

A QUEEN FOR THE REGENT



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FOREWORD

THE FOUR GEORGES, coming out of the blue to the throne of England, were strange and somewhat incomprehensible men, quite different from any others of our kings. George the Third was the one who reigned the longest, and he died mad. How everybody else did not die mad because of him, I cannot imagine. Never a very attractive man, he was overruled by a disciplinary wife who laid down the law with severity and saw that it was obeyed.

This book is of the fourth George.

His father had seven sons; one would say that they were fairly flighty, wine, women and song was the idea of the era; and the fourth George (then the gallant Prince of Wales, later Prince Regent) became famous as a beau—until he got too fat—for his devotion to the fairer sex, for his love of that strange amusement the practical joke, and for the building of the amazing Pavilion at Brighton. Never out of debt, he went playfully from one crisis to the next.

George the Fourth was gay and careless, in many ways enchanting, and he contrived to live successfully on borrowed money. He ran his country into debt, and always trusted 'dear Mama' to get him out of his troubles. Dear Mama rated him severely, and slapped him at times, but she did the job remarkably well.

George was a degenerate, handsome in the fair-haired

Teuton manner, until his obesity overcame this beauty, a lover of the arts, and a curious mixture of the profligate, the great lover, and the mawkish lad about town. Frequently, he could be ridiculous.

He married the first time, Mrs. Maria Fitzherbert, the delightful widow of the late Mr. Thomas Fitzherbert, and he was undoubtedly in love with her. The late Mr. Fitzherbert had been described as 'a tall powerful man, with a tendency to corpulency, which he endeavoured to counteract by great abstemiousness in diet, and by the most astonishing efforts to bodily activity, and violent exercises, to which finally he fell a victim'.

Maria, his young widow, was only twenty-four at the time of his death, and already had had the misfortune to suffer the same loss previously. Her second husband left her a thousand pounds yearly (then a fortune) and a comfortable house in Park Street in London, with all the handsome furniture he had bought for it, and most excellent equipment. She had horses and carriages, and also ponies, for generally she drove out in a phaeton.

The death of her second husband occurring more or less suddenly in Nice, had shocked her severely. I doubt if she was in love with him, but she had married twice, to suit Papa, who arranged such little matters for her. She was a good obedient girl, and would have been dismayed by the thought of disobeying Papa in any manner.

She did not return to London, however, until Lord Sefton, who was Papa's half-brother, begged her not to fret abroad so long.

If she came back to the city, and the gaiety which it could offer—and he implored her to remember that one was 'only young once'—then she would be happier. It was time to get over her tears. She took his advice, and in 1781 Mrs. Fitzherbert left Nice and coming to London spent the summer

in Brighton; it was rapidly becoming a fashionable place, with a charming beach and front, and surrounded by the most enchanting downs, where one could have pleasant walks.

She arrived chaperoned, and was introduced into society, by Lady Sefton, who was kind to her, and never did a chaperone do better. Maria was enthralled by the gaiety, the driving in the park every day, the dancing in luxurious drawing-rooms half the night, and the meeting of exciting new friends. So much happened, and there were such delightful people to meet.

What happened next?

Something which perhaps we today might have thought to be impossible, though the story has been repeated in most of our lifetimes—the devoted love of a royal person for a commoner.

Now Maria Fitzherbert was a good girl.

She had never been flirtatious; she sang prettily, she was extremely good-looking, and loved being entertained. Wealth would never have won her, though pity *would* have done, for she had the kindest heart.

Is it possible that she knew this problematical Prince of Wales from a very different angle from what others could do? He was a young man brought up by an absurdly strict mama, and a father who had little understanding of his needs, and who left the children to the nagging supervision of his wife. The principles of royal upbringing during that period of history were that the sons of all royal houses must study hard, being given as little recreation as was possible, and each of them must be well whipped as frequently as he could be, just to show who was master, and be certain that he appreciated this.

George the Fourth (to-be) was a highly sensitive and imaginative child; he hated the loathsome routine through which his education had been conducted; he would have loved

his mama fondly, save that she was so much stricter than his father could be, and his affection for her somewhat naturally faded; he shrank from her commands.

Maria Fitzherbert, charming, young, very pretty and with what in those days amounted to richness, was a sweet personality and a devout Catholic. At that hour never for a moment would she have thought that her love story would be one of the most outstanding in the history books. Her behaviour throughout it was meticulous in the extreme, none could ever have reproached her, not even the hard old Queen, who always alluded to her as 'That woman'. She had married twice, and had been a good wife, but she had never loved either of those men as she loved this one man. Maybe she understood him; if she did, she must have been the only one in the history books.

This is the story of her love.

L.P.

ONE

THE PRINCE OF WALES, eldest son of King George the Third of England, was a gay young man. He had a merry blue eye for a charming lady, admitting this quite frankly; light fair hair of the Teutonic flavour; and acting on the principle that we live but once, was determined to enjoy his one life to the full.

He was brought up in Kew Palace, then in the wilds of the country, and with the river running past the garden where he played. There, most of his spare time was spent in the most vigorous gardening, possibly the only recreation permitted for himself and his many brothers. He was a flighty youth, fond of a good joke, amused by life and ready to laugh; but the pathway to a crown demands more than this, as he found.

Even when he was quite a child it was becoming fairly plain that his papa was a man of moods, which changed as swiftly as the winds of heaven. At one moment he would be dependable, much the King, and stern; at another he would insist that different trees in the garden were gentlemen whom he knew well, and bushes their lady wives, and he would go up and down with an amiable 'Good morning, Sir John,' to the ash tree, and 'My felicitations, dear lady,' to an elderberry bush with cream flowers on it.

One thing was quite certain, nobody (and this went for his sons also) quite understood this erratic King. He had married

one of the plainest German Princesses, a tartar too! She was a woman born to be a martinet, and she vowed that she could manage her husband. The curious thing is that, unlike most of the royal Georges, this man did stay faithful to his wife, and did obey her commands on most matters.

The King was insistent that all his sons should undergo a most rigorous education, and shirk nothing. It was the era of intensive book learning, and all children must be well and truly flogged to make men of them, otherwise they would grow up into difficult adults. Anybody who spared the rod was asking for trouble.

George, Prince of Wales, was a blond boy. He was a very good-looking child, and had been born with a highly sensitive nature, destined to be severely bruised by his somewhat violent upbringing. He was an eager friend, and loved people, especially those who were kind to him. Himself responsive to love, he desired above all things that he should love his mother with a vigorous devotion; he clung to her, and tried to prove this to her. But the Queen was not a good mother; spoiling at one moment, she made him sick with sticky sweets which she retained for him in the drawer of her dressing-table; and then whipped him with her slippers, calling in his sisters to show them how well she did it!

She stood for no nonsense with her sons.

Today we should have realised how wrong was such a strict upbringing (more especially from the woman whom this child desired to love devotedly); and what a significance it had on his later life, and the moulding of his extraordinary character when he became adult.

He was sporting; he rode in the park which later became Kew Gardens, and he played with his brothers. The story was told that here was a young man who liked women, but this is, of course, the eternal scandal which is associated with princes. He did like women, naturally. Pretty maids-of-honour boasted

of his audacious kisses, his claspings of the hands, when Mama was not looking, even his encroachment into their bedrooms as he grew older, with the promise of a crown later on. They liked him. He had everything that a prince should have, beauty, amusing ways, and a gay heart.

By the time that this eldest son had come into his middle teens his father had changed considerably. He had become more rigorous, more conformed to some of his wife's doctrines, and now he indulged in fits of peculiar temper which arose for no real reason, and were extremely hard to explain. He always appeared to be aware of other people in the room with him, or walking about the gardens, people whom his sons could not even see, let alone explain.

He told them of men he had talked with this morning, and friends who had called on him, and who they knew had never been to the palace, which made life difficult. Was he seeing things they could not see? Was he mad? What *was* happening to Papa?

Naturally, the king is never wrong, and this meant that his family had to steer a dubious course, and pretend they saw things and people they did not see, and eternally question their own ability to see and hear what Papa did.

The Prince of Wales was by nature a naughty boy. Through that difficult childhood the one thing he longed for was for somebody to love, and this somebody never appeared. Roused at six in the morning on a cold winter's day to study Latin and Greek, he would be allowed half an hour for breakfast, after which he worked until midday, with another hour for food. He could take a brief walk in the afternoon, and then must fill the rest of the day with study. What chance did he have? A gay young man, a merry one who was fond of fun, fond of gaiety and wanting to amuse himself, what in the world could one do to damp him further than give him this most irksome education?

"But a King must be well-informed," said the matriarch of a mama.

He was eighteen years of age when he started his first violent love affair, and it was with the famous actress, Mrs. Robinson. She was extremely lovely, and quite naturally she was flattered to be the first love and attract the attention of the handsome young man who one day would be the King of England.

When the news got round to Papa, George the Third was raving with rage. What had gone wrong? How dare Georgie do this? He had insisted on an arduous education for all his sons, and, as he put it, with no time at all to get into mischief; now this was happening. His two elder sons were becoming well known for their habits (both indulged themselves in wine, woman and song), and the truth was that they were gaily flirtatious young men.

The King was a most ardent Tory, and did not care who knew it, which was sufficient for the sons to go over to the Whigs, almost *en bloc*! They roistered, it was the hobby of the day. They drank hard. Many of the maids-of-honour were seduced, and one of them, it was said, actually *in* Mama's bedroom!

"My sons were never beaten hard enough," said the King in a right royal rage.

"It is too late now," said Mama, who all along had been firm in the form of upbringing in which her husband had put his all. He would not be anything but strict.

"He must be stopped. Georgie must behave himself, and Freddy is a disgrace."

"But how can we stop them?" asked Mama coldly.

Already the Prince of Wales had outgrown their supervision and control. The mistakes in their training showed through, and he suffered for the way he had been spoilt and pampered one day and severely flogged the next. He was unsure

of the royal world in which he lived, and Georgie would be King of England one day.

He came of age in the August of 1785, with an allowance of £50,000 from the Civil List, and Parliament would give him an extra £30,000 to pay off the massive debts which he had already acquired. He was a careless young man with money, could never say 'no' to anything that he wanted, and this had to be settled. Also he would require an establishment of his own; he was looking forward to this with delight, for it would be entrancing to live happily ever after, and *without* the parents.

Free from them at last, or almost so (at least they could not punish him any more), he turned to Carlton House, and he produced in it the most magnificent palace of his own. He had a genius for decoration; he struck the heights, and also fell to the depths in an extraordinary manner.

"You will have to marry, Georgie," said Mama.

He had no intention of doing this, and said so. "I will not be shuffled into marriage with some woman whom I do not like, Mama," said he.

"All Princes of Wales wed," she told him, sternly.

This time he was too big to be flogged. "We shall see about that, Mama," said he, and he giggled. "*We shall see.*"

She was, of course, indignant with him, and after all that she had done for him, propitiating insistent tradesmen, trying to make Parliament see that boys will be boys, and it is wisdom for older men to excuse this. "You will have to be a good boy, Georgie," she said, "or there will be trouble."

Trouble was already waving the red flag just ahead of them!

Georgie was not the young man to be hurried.

Being established in his own house, with very few people who were able to say 'no' to him, he had life to himself, and there was little that the family could do to stem his power or

curtail his actions. He was extremely good-looking at this time, with the pale flaxen hair, and the brightest soft blue eyes, known as the royal forget-me-nots. He had charm of manner, and could make himself utterly enchanting when he so chose. He was in a whirl of joy when two of his brothers defied their father, and gave their mama hysterics, by marrying commoner ladies.

Mama is not pleased! he wrote to them.

The King felt that with this refractory family he must do something to stop such nonsense. He would not have his sons marry whosoever they pleased, regardless of whom he and his advisers chose for them. In a fury he made the Tories introduce the Royal Marriages Act, to stop all this bosh! It now became a felony for members of the royal household to marry without the King's consent, until they were over the suitable age of twenty-five.

"This is an excellent idea," said the Queen, who was indignant with her sons. Being such a martinet, she wanted to make sure that this behaviour could not occur again. She told her eldest son that it was the hour for him to wed, to produce lusty sons who could inherit the throne when his days ran out. The thought of his days ever running out was hardly alluring to this gay young man!

"Not yet, Mama," said he, and waved the mere idea aside with his hand.

"Georgie will live to be a burden," she told her dearest friends. Maybe she was correct there. Georgie did become some considerable burden, not only to the taxpayers and the House, who had to do something for him, but to his own family.

He was a charmer. He was alluring. He fought the next election, making Carlton House (his home) a committee room for the Whigs, a thing which royalty had never done before, and which was now achieved to show Papa and Mama that

he could do it, and he would. He started consorting with people in established society (Whigs, all of them), and when his parents disapproved, smiled blandly, and said that this was his own life, and he was enjoying it very much, thank you!

His father's mental weakness was increasing. He flew into violent paroxysms of temper which worried everybody and made it a most shocking position for the poor Queen. In a calmer moment she begged her husband to ask the Lord Chancellor to help them to get rid of their eldest son's ridiculous friends, with that 'detestable man Fox who is leading him astray, and into such very deep water'. They were anxious. But of course nobody would ever be able to stop him. Perhaps the truth of the matter was that this gaily fascinating and entirely unorthodox Prince of Wales never had a chance.

Fox guided him, and he liked that. It was too late to try to stay him. He had satisfactorily installed himself in his own home, where he could do practically what he wished. He loved Carlton House and the freedom it gave him. He looked out of its windows on to a brave new world—his world, or so he hoped—and for the first time he was radiantly happy.

This was when the lovely Maria, twice widowed, came up from Brighton to take possession of her home in Park Street and there to live the life of a lady of leisure.

By now Maria had recovered from the loss of her second husband. She was a sweetly sympathetic girl, born under an unlucky star. Perhaps now she realised that two husbands so considerably older than herself, had never been lovers, or even equals. Perhaps it had been like wedding two papas!

Her father was Walter Smythe, second son of Sir John Smythe, Baronet, and she had been born in 1756. The family were violent Catholic Royalists, and the baronetcy had come

to them through the gift of King Charles the Second in 1660. They lived at Bramwell in Hampshire, where their six children (Maria was the eldest) had been born and brought up.

At the time when she had come into the world, a man's or a woman's adherence to the Catholic faith had to be followed with the utmost caution, so that from her earliest years the little girl had learnt that life was difficult, and presented a hard road along which one trod. Roman Catholics could not be encouraged; in fact they could be received only behind locked doors.

For a time she had been sent to be educated at the Ursuline convent in Paris, where she was extremely happy (for she adored her faith), was devoted to the good nuns, and admired by all of them.

She would, I imagine, have been about sixteen years of age when she returned to Bramwell to live, and to the few Catholic friends who clung faithfully together there, in an England where their faith made them slightly taboo. She was only just eighteen years of age when she married a widower, who had had no children, and was the head of an aristocratic Catholic family. He was twenty-six years older than the girl whom he married, but from all accounts they were intensely happy together. He understood her, spoilt her, so they said, and shared her gaiety of spirit, and her spontaneous youth and beauty, and she delighted him.

He suffered a fall from his horse, and died at Lulworth Castle, where he and his pretty wife were living at the time, and which now passed on to the brother, who was his heir. Maria had had no children.

She knew that her own family were not comfortably off, they had always had to direct living with an eye to the financial side of it, and she was well accustomed to this. She had four young brothers who had to be educated in a world which was difficult. They could share none of the pursuits

which were given to the Protestants, were not permitted to join the Army, or the Navy, or the Bar. No Government appointments were available for them, and they must have been something of a worry to parents who were *not* well off.

Naturally, having a widowed daughter flung back on to their hands was scarcely the best of ideas for them, but three years later Maria re-married. This time she chose Mr. Thomas Fitzherbert; he was the twenty-fifth Lord of the Manor, and was one of those amiable Catholics who was not narrow about his faith, but was for ever doing his best to bring the two faiths closer together.

He married Maria, loving her deeply, and brought her to live in his London House in Park Street. Here she and her husband did well. Even the King liked him, and being a Catholic gentleman this must have been rather surprising. In this comfortable home, they lived together happily enough, entertaining constantly. It was within its doors that pressure was brought to bear on Parliament to repeal some of the most obnoxious rulings and laws which upset the people of the Catholic faith.

Mr. Fitzherbert was a large man, tall and good-looking, but inclined to run to stoutness. He tried to bring down his weight by adhering to the régime which the doctors ordered for him in diet, but somehow it did not have very much effect. He took violent exercise, much hoping that this would help, and did surprising pedestrian feats, which, in the end, caused a pulmonary disease to assert itself, and this he could not get rid of.

Maria was deeply fond of him, far fonder than she had been of her first husband, perhaps because she had grown older and wiser. Between them they could help the faith, and this inspired her. In the end, she was distracted by his condition. She felt that England was too chilly for him, the winters too stark, and lasting too long a while, for what could

be more wretched than the early English spring? She drove him to spend the winter in the south of France, where she felt sure that he would be more comfortable.

Here they took a fascinating villa in Nice, with mimosa and stocks blossoming in the garden, and the first roses as early in the year as February. Surely he must recover here? she told herself. Alas, she did not appreciate the fact that already the disease had gone too far, and there could be no recovery. He died that spring.

Poor Maria was desolate.

She was now twenty-four years old, childless, to her deep regret, and utterly alone. She had been left the beautiful house in Park Street, and an income of one thousand pounds a year, all the furniture, the horses and carriages, everything that she could possibly want. But she did not return immediately to London. She was shy and afraid of it, and for nearly a year she remained in Nice, where she worked for the destitute English Catholics there, and tried to help them.

In 1781 she gave all this up, and came back to London to live, for her uncle, her father's half-brother, and a Protestant, urged her to come back to society, and he and his wife would help her.

By now she had recovered from the loss of her second husband, whom she had loved dearly; she was able to console herself with music, with entertaining, and meeting new people.

Her hair was fairish, though not as fair as was the Prince's; she had a bright complexion, with colour which came and went most attractively (she blushed easily, which was enchanting. Her eyes were very sweet, and plainly she would make a success of her life in London. She knew of the Prince of Wales's cavalier behaviour with women, of course (all the world had heard of the affair with the famous Mrs. Robinson), and she was interested in him personally. A lively prince in his own establishment, who entertained vigorously, was

bound to be the chatter of London. It was the mode to discuss him, and for unwed ladies to be in love with him. In good society he was popular, it was one of the eras when entertainment was at its height, and the thing to do was to get oneself invited to Carlton House.

The strange thing was that so far the Prince had been indignant at the thought of marriage. 'I shall never wed' was what he maintained.

His parents were furious with him. They disliked the people he invited to Carlton House, particularly those disgusting Whigs, and the women! What was he thinking of? They blamed Mr. Fox for misguiding the young man, but what could they do? In fact the King even spoke to the Lord Chancellor for advice on how to break this friendship for ever.

When Mrs. Fitzherbert arrived in London for her first happy season, life was exciting, and the Prince a leader. Sooner or later she was bound to meet him, that was clear. It came sooner than she had anticipated.

It was at the opera. The Prince had entered the royal box with all the panoply and thrill that always accompanied such moments, had stood there for the national anthem, then had relaxed, and after bowing magnificently to the full house, sat down and had a good look at the audience. Particularly at the women.

Maria was sitting in the stalls, properly chaperoned, of course, it was the era of the chaperone, and anyway, she was one of those people who would never have broken any ruling of this kind. She wore a soft blue dress, with a sash and scarf of darker blue studded with silver stars. A woman friend was with her, and almost instantly her lovely face caught the royal attention. Whatever one can say about the Prince, one thing is absolutely true, he never missed a pretty face, or a charming figure, and a white bosom.

"Who is that most sweet lady?" he asked.

For the moment his *aide* (whose business it was to know everything) did not know, and instantly one of the gentlemen was despatched to the owners of the theatre to discover who the lady in blue could be. He returned with the news that, although she was so young, she had already been married twice, and widowed the same number of times; the Prince had not seen her before because she had spent some time in the south of France, where her second husband had died, but she had recently returned to his house in Park Street, and her name was Mrs. Fitzherbert. She had inherited the house from her second husband, and also she was a Roman Catholic.

This was, of course, the most disastrous piece of news, though it is dubious if it disturbed His Royal Highness too much at the time, for he was far too deeply attracted to the lady to think of anything like this. He knew all that he wanted to know. She was charming, she was free, she had no jealous husband in the background of her life, who would be likely to engage him in a duel or run him through with a sword at an inopportune moment. He could not take his eyes off her. He did not care who noticed this (he was always a very obvious young man when he got hold of an idea), and nothing would divert him. Very soon everybody else in the theatre became aware—some with amusement—of exactly what was happening.

He sent one of his gentlemen-in-waiting round to her seat with his card, asking permission to be allowed to come down from his box to visit her. She was startled, possibly by now considerably embarrassed by what was happening, and she refused to give this permission. She was not the sort of gentlewoman who submitted herself to informalities in this manner. Never had a lady been stricter; never had a lover been less strict than H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. And the

thing which as yet she did not know, was that snubbing encouraged him.

"I'll get to know her yet," he promised himself cheerfully, and his gentlemen hearing him felt fairly sure that undoubtedly this was exactly what he *would* do!

He made a gallant attempt to leave the theatre a shade early, with the idea of waiting in the foyer until she came out, and then waylaying her, but this venture miscarried, and he was hustled into one of the royal carriages, and, despite his own indignation, driven back to Carlton House.

He was distracted.

'I am in love' was the way in which the Prince put it. 'Unless I can see such a darling, talk with her, embrace her, and taste the sweetness of those lips, I shall wilt and fade away . . . I could die . . .'

Invariably he talked along these lines, and somewhat naturally his gentlemen were not much impressed by it, for it was constantly happening. He would not die, of course. They hoped that he would get over it, he usually did, for there was always some other fair charmer who appeared round the next corner of his life, and diverted his somewhat fickle interests. Usually the more ordinary girls went into ecstasies when they first learnt that H.R.H. was 'pursuing' them, and the enchantment of the chase compelled him.

The Prince wrote a discreet letter to Maria from Carlton House asking her to a ball there. He felt that at all costs they simply *must* meet. He felt already that there was a bond between them, and a desperate devotion which, unless he could dedicate its depths to her, would drive him mad. The letter was slightly eulogistic, most certainly pedantic and exaggerated, and not at all the kind of wise letter which Maria would have anticipated from a prince so close to the throne. She consulted her women friends. They were wildly interested; they told her, and with truth, that of course His Royal

Highness's letter to her was nothing more or less than a royal command.

She wept a little.

"At all costs I do not want anything dreadful to happen," she said.

Her friends sought to comfort her, and told her of the things which had happened before, with this very amatory young man. "The Prince enjoys constant flirtations," they said, "but they do not last. None of them have been enduring. I imagine that he means little by them, and there is no need for you to concern yourself too deeply about it."

"I am not flirtatious."

"Heaven forbid!" they said, "but the line of safety lies in the fact that the Prince's affairs seldom last long; they are violent when they start, but they dry up like the April rain in the sunshine of May."

At the same time, the poor lady was not enjoying the position. She did not like the idea at all. "Something must stop it, and I am the last person to take the right action," she said. "I only pray that nothing truly alarming will happen. That he will find someone else, someone dearer."

She was a modest woman, and had never flown in such high society before, therefore was unnerved by it. Secretly she was afraid of princes, and said so. She did not consider that she was sufficiently well versed in the matter of court behaviour, to risk meeting the Heir Apparent, so she held back.

"You are being a trifle absurd," the women friends told her. "Today everybody goes to Carlton House to meet the Prince. He has changed the old times when royalty did not mix with the common herd. They say that he has a love affair for every day of the year, and all the world laughs over it. One day he is head over heels in love with a girl whose hair is black as ink, and the next he has lost his heart to a flaxen

blonde. You need have no fear, no scruples, and no reluctance. His moods change so quickly that none are alarmed by them."

"I could not possibly accept any invitation to a ball at Carlton House," she said quite wretchedly.

"But you must accept. None dare refuse the Heir Apparent. You *must* go to the ball."

Although twice wedded, shyness was one of the lady's biggest anxieties, and she was alarmed beyond belief. She was also afraid of *young* men. Her life so far had been involved solely with much older ones. Her father, whom she had deeply loved, and both her husbands, had been considerably older than she was. It would not be easy to make friends with one as young as the Prince of Wales, and she had already come to the conclusion that the men whom she preferred *were* the older ones.

But in the end she was talked round.

She accepted the invitation to Carlton House, and bought a very special dress for it, the colour of larkspur in July, and flounced with a tender shade of lavender.

"I do feel that I should never go there, and that I am making a bad mistake," she said, "and for this error I shall pay heavily later on." There was the echo of a sob in her voice.

Her friends were naturally most encouraging. They knew how amusing the gallant Prince could be when in love, and it would be great fun for all of them.

"But how can it go wrong?" they asked her, and they laughed gaily about it. "You must overcome this absurd shyness of yours. Widows cannot be shy; they are married women, and shyness is the *maiden* sin. You are far too nervous. Be sensible, and proud that your beauty has attracted His Royal Highness, and that he now asks you to visit him at his palace."

She was more than reluctant, poor girl. She had been born with a vigorous sense of premonition, which was part of her make-up. When she had been a small child, she told her old nurse that she knew what lay on the other side of a door, before it was opened. She 'felt' friends or foes there.

'I should not be going,' she still told herself.

It was one of those exquisite nights in June when London can be so beautiful. The park was peaceful, one would never think of it being full of thieves and knaves, who snatched money from travellers, and sometimes held up carriages; of lovers seeking happiness behind the low bushes. King Charles the Second had loved this park, and said it was a place of dreams. She also thought of it in this manner.

As they approached the courtyard, their carriage became involved with a stream of others, for all the world and his wife were dancing here tonight. Also there were the sedan chairs being borne along with portly aldermen inside them, and link boys going ahead. They had to wait for their turn, and it took far longer than the girl had ever expected, poor thing, so that she started to tremble. Out of the distance there came the sweet music of a string band, for the Prince, solicitous for his waiting guests, had ordered a band to play in a small courtyard, so that those waiting could be somewhat eased by the cadence of music.

At last it came to their turn, and she stepped out of her carriage, and into the magnificent house which the Prince had improved beyond belief, and made perhaps one of the most exciting palaces in England. He had a delicious good taste in decoration, which none of the other members of his family had got, and he delighted in moulding his own backcloth.

What an amazingly fabulous home this was, with those huge glass chandeliers of a thousand candles at a time, and footmen spending the entire evening keeping them alight.

What lovely embroidered hangings in colours such as she had never seen before! He was the prince of colour, she told herself. The furniture was ravishing, for he never spared the expense. Debt was a millstone which he hung about his neck, and then eventually found someone else to pay it off. Possibly Mama! Mama had the art of managing Parliament, and could make them do what she asked. If they were as afraid of Mama as he was, then he could well understand it, and he laughed at the idea.

He might be extravagant, but what was the use of being the next King of England if he could not have what he desired in his home?

Maria entered the superb palace with some anxiety, and in line with others who had got there before her, she proceeded in the direction of their host. As they came closer, she knew that the Prince, with that eternal eye of his on the things which really mattered to him, had recognised her, for the eyes brightened, and he smiled. Light had come to his darkness, was the way he would have put it! The lady who was with Maria sought permission to introduce her friend, and stood back to indicate Maria in the soft blue dress.

"Mrs. Maria Fitzherbert, Your Royal Highness," she said, and proudly, because of course she knew well that this could be one of those exciting friendships (anyway for a short while, none of his friendships lasted very long) which led to prosperity for the lady concerned.

The Prince blushed like some eager boy, wildly responsive to her. "Madam . . .?" and he held out a fat hand dimpled like a babe's. "I have waited for this moment with eagerness, madame. I am honoured by the joy of your presence here. God bless your loveliness, and your courage! I am your everlasting servant."

She curtsied low, dropping her head to hide the flush which had come to her cheeks, for she was ashamed that she

had flushed. She would have drawn back instantly, but he put out a hand, and stayed her. As far as he was concerned, this was naturally *the* moment of the evening, for at last he had got the fly into his spider's web. She would be his! Someone else could receive the rest of these silly guests, there was a crowd of them as dull as a February ditch, and he put out his hand again, and gently lifted her to her feet.

"Now, Madam, we will walk together," was what he said.

She could not refuse. In dismay she glanced at the long line of guests behind her, and the Duke of York stepping forward to take his brother's place, and this would not be for the first time in his life. She was somewhat alarmed to find that he was leading her away, the crowd drawing back on either side of them, with all the women curtsying low but having a quick look at her, not entirely with approval. What do I do? she asked herself. There was nothing that she *could* do.

They went out of the room into a small ante-room which lay beyond. She knew instinctively that a footman closed the door quietly on them, well versed in the good behaviour of servants to the gallant Prince of Wales.

She could not refuse him (well aware of her duty to him), and she allowed herself to follow as one in a dream. The small octagon-shaped room was one of a kind which H.R.H. infinitely preferred. It was painted in the palest tan, and somehow this cast a strange glossy glow on the exquisite furniture. It was lit, as everywhere else in this private house which was a palace, by candlelight from profuse glistening chandeliers.

Somehow the others had faded away and they were alone, and he turned to her. He was very fair, with a magnificent tea-rose skin, lightly flushed, and the eyes were almost flagrantly blue.

"I have been eagerly awaiting this divine moment," was

what he said, a trifle breathlessly, for he was agog at his good fortune.

"Sir," and she curtsied low. How good-looking he was, so fair, and how amiably he smiled! Then she said, "I came to your house with friends, Sir, and they will be waiting for my return to them."

He shook his head.

"At the same time I am your most willing host. I would seek news of you, to know more about you, and to speak with you." He took her hand, and led her across to the sofa at the other end of the room. It was curled round in a curious manner, the right hand end of it raised to form a head-rest, and the colour of the material matched the light tan of the walls. But on the matching cushions three white feathers were grouped together. "We now actually meet for the first time. I am told that you are widowed, and you lost your husband when abroad?"

"I have been widowed twice, Sir," she said very gently. She was afraid, and maybe this was foolish of her, for she knew he could do nothing to harm her, he was charming and kindly in the extreme, and sought only to be pleasant. Why had people talked so wrongly about a tender and solicitous young man? He smiled at her.

"You are too young for such sadness, and I would seek to bring laughter to your eyes, and a new gaiety to your heart," was what he promised her.

She shook her head. "I fear me, Sir, that sadness comes to all of us at some time or other, it is part of the cross which we are forced to bear in this dark world, and one which we must carry to the bitter end."

He smiled again. "You are very brave, Madam. You live in Park Street, I believe, in the house which your late husband left to you? Is that so?" and his voice was kind.

"Yes, Sir, I do live there."

He warmed to the occasion, and asked her many questions as they sat side by side. He had a charming manner, and was both encouraging and sympathetic; she felt herself melting to his goodness of heart. No longer was he the Prince who would come to the throne when his father died, and she the commoner, for it seemed that they had already come far closer than that. She warmed to him. She admired his good manners. She could not be severe for long with one who was so amiable, and who had such adorable charm.

"We will return and dance?" he said.

Instantly, as though some unseen person had heard what he said, the big double doors were swung open by flunkeys wearing the Windsor uniform, and now they could see through the exquisite rooms going all the way to the far side of the house.

The place was lit entirely by the wax candles which gave a soft fluttering light, surely the sweetest light of all, so she thought. There was the scent of flowers, of roses and lilies, for this was summertime, and the blossoms of the English summer are like those of no other summer in all the world.

It is an amazing world, she thought.

As the Prince entered with his partner, the band struck up with a well loved tune, and he led her into the ballroom. Mechanically she did what he did, deeply attracted to him. And now, as they came within view of the other assembled guests, she knew that all of them were closely watching her. *This is a dream, she told herself, the dream I have always dreamt deep down within me, and it can never be true.*

Never before had she consorted with a man near to her own age; he was seven years younger than she was, and his youth, his gaiety, the impulsive loveliness of this age, were inspiring. Both her husbands had been so considerably older than she, and when she was a mere child her father had told

her that she was 'born to be an old man's darling'. Now a young man was holding her hand, and part of her felt alarmed, for nothing had ever happened like this before. Life had changed, as though some fairy had waved a wand. She knew now that she was uplifted in a strange manner, and somehow all the time the sublime devotion of her faith made her shrink from the meeting. She prayed that her head would not be turned, and that she would not be misled by the compliments which he paid her.

"We will dance?" he asked her.

The band began again as he entered holding the lady's hand. He led her forward, and as he did so every eye was on her. How the tongues would wag later on! The thought alarmed her, for they would tear her gown to pieces, and her behaviour and her looks! She was frightened; naturally nothing of this kind had ever happened to her before, and she realised that in a single instant the whole of her ordinary world had changed. She was uplifted, yet the quiet emotional heart of her shrank from this deception. She prayed that she did not give herself airs, or grandeur or anything unworthy, because a prince had danced with her.

The ecstasy which this Prince could always inspire in others, filled her with a new joy. It was madness, of course, a sort of shy midsummer madness, she told herself. He was so far removed from her position in life that she never thought of him as being more than a passing friend.

Nervously withdrawing from emotional scenes, she told herself that whatever else happened in her life, she must never fall in love with him. They were poles apart. He was a prince, in fact *the* Prince of Wales, dedicated to the throne of England, and in this position a bride would be found for him, possibly already decided on, chosen without any decision of his. These things happened to men in his position.

He told her that she attracted him.

He spoke of the loneliness of being the eldest son of his father, and of being as a boy a prisoner in Kew Palace, with the gardens running down to the banks of the amiable river, and there had actually been times when he would have chosen death in those cool waters rather than go on ahead to the Stone of Scone. But he *had* gone on. He spoke of the hardships and the immense amount of learning which had had to be forced into him; also the complications of having a father who had sudden fits of aberration, and one never knew what he would do next. Officially it was not permitted that one spoke of it, but in the home one always had to be on guard against his ways. He would have loved the man if he could have done so, but he was far too difficult and contradictory. She sympathised deeply. She had been devoted to her own father, as she said, and could not have imagined life without him. The Prince spoke of the domination of his often severe German mother, who stood no nonsense from refractory sons.

"I loved her so much once," he admitted sadly, for Maria was the woman in whom he could confide and whom he could trust.

"But she loved you?"

"I don't really know. Sometimes I doubted it."

Gently she said, "Oh, she must have loved you and I am sure she would have done everything she could for you. I am quite sure."

He laughed at that. "I was little more than a baby when she first beat me with her slipper," he said. "Now that I am grown-up and too big for that, she ever beats me with her tongue!" He tried to hide the sorrow in his blue eyes. "She understands too well how to make it hurt me," he added.

Deeply sympathetic, one of those rare women who never condemn, Mrs. Fitzherbert said, "It is just that she does *not* understand, poor lady."

He shrugged his shoulders and changed the subject. "I am in love with Germany," he said.

"Now I myself prefer France, Sir," and she smiled. She had lovely memories of living there with her husband. Of the Riviera with the wild anemones everywhere, in claret, and ruby, and purple; of the trees so beautiful with blossom in the spring; and of valleys which smelt so divinely of lemon and of orange.

"Ah, the French!" and his dancing blue eyes went to heaven. "I admit that they have the best wines, and the loveliest of all women. But all their women are dark-haired, and I ask all my women to be fair!" Suddenly she felt herself flush as she realised that this was a compliment that he was paying her, for *she* was fair. She saw danger ahead of her. For one almost agonising moment she saw a distress greater than any which she had deemed to be possible; great joy, and then extreme loneliness; great hope, and desire, great longing; but the world against her, even the humble quiet people whom she had never known. What it meant she did not know, but her heart warned her of the danger. It could bring her intense unhappiness. "I am afraid . . ." she faltered. "I see tears ahead, and doubt . . . even despair. This must end here, and now; it has no future."

He turned to her, his eyes almost afire. "Why not?" he asked. "I have a right to live my own life, in the way I most desire, and with the woman I can truly love. Sweet lady, from the first moment I saw you I knew there were none like you. Hope lit a lamp to guide my path." He paused for a single moment, then he spoke again. He whispered it. "I'd crown resign to call thee mine . . ." was what he said.

The way in which he said it gave the words a new sweetness to her, and she recognised that they had the power to impress her enormously! She was too moved to speak more, so he led her back to the dance. They danced three times,

one after the other, and somehow his good manners, his sincerity and kindness of purpose, managed to silence those abundant apprehensions which had sprung within her. She *was* happy.

Never before had she been in a young man's arms. Two older men had preceded him, and this new experience irradiated her. She had never realised how much she had missed with men so much older than herself. What was happening tonight was a dream, surely? Something from which she would suddenly awaken with morning. She tried to pull herself together.

"Sir," she said, very gently and quietly so that none could hear, "other people are watching us all the time. For your royal sake, if not for my own, I do pray that we rest for a while, to escape the public eye?"

"Only on the one condition, that the moment you are rested, and happier, you permit me to return to you?"

She saw the yearning in his young eyes, and felt her own heart miss a beat. "I can only do this, Sir, on the condition that you have at least four dances with others."

"It shall be so," and half-defiantly, "four deadly dances with others."

He took her back to her seat beside her chaperone, bowing low, then turned to a much older woman, with all the charm and grace of which he had so much. The music for the minuet had begun, provocative and dainty, almost an invitation on stringed instruments, and Maria sought a quiet rest. She could not understand what had happened to her, or what she would do. Her friend, eager to know what had taken place, turned eagerly to her.

"What did he say? Everyone is talking about it, all the world and its wife. Everybody! He is in love with you, Maria. He must be in love with you to be so conspicuous and determined, and surely you have guessed it? He loses his heart very

easily, poor young man! Don't think he means anything by it, it constantly happens within these walls. He is in love. *Pro tem*, of course, only *pro tem*."

Half of her hoped that to be true, for it would be quite shocking to have any scandal connected with her name, and London lived on gossip, and tittle-tattled far too much. She had come from France, widowed and alone, longing for her own home, for new friends, and perhaps the gay society here. She did not want some chatterboxes linking her name with the Prince, more so after the notorious affair with Mrs. Robinson. She tried to laugh it off.

"Quite ridiculous! He is just a kind prince being nice to a girl who is a stranger here."

"At the same time, kind or not kind, he never stays long in love with a woman. Do remember that. It is too easy to lose the heart, Maria, so easy and so foolish, and it can hurt so much."

She was right, of course, Maria knew it only too well, and already she realised that perhaps because she had never known a young man's love before, she was drawn to this handsome and most charming young man. Her friend asked what the Prince had talked about, and found that he had enquired of the two husbands whom she had lost so tragically, her unhappiness and deadly loneliness, and her determination never to wed again. This way she would never have a child, of course (and she adored children). This way her life would be barren of the two great joys, children to bless her, and the love of an adorable young man.

"But none could wed the Prince, he is above us; his marriage to some foreign royal lady must already be arranged," said her friend, "it would be madness to lose your heart to him."

Even as they were talking the fourth dance was over, and one of the Prince's gentlemen came across, and bowed low.

"I come from the Prince of Wales, Madam," he said; "he asks me if you would for a moment come to speak with him?"

She saw that they had done dancing, and the guests were moving away. Had the hour come, with the clock past one, and the first of the guests departing? Outside, their chairs would be waiting for them, and their carriages for those who had distance to travel. She glanced at her friend, searching for some hint as to what was the right thing to do, for she was lost as to the next move.

"What do I do?" she whispered helplessly.

"I will come with you."

They followed their escort through double doors of light paint picked out with gold, and over every handle the three white feathers of a Prince of Wales, and the motto *Ich Dien*.

At the last door of all, their escort turned to the older woman, and he indicated an elegant sofa curled into a corner in the wall; it was of soft green, the colour of sweet lime trees in the early springtime, and surely the loveliest green in all the world? The Prince understood colours, and always chose the best.

"If you would rest here one moment, Madam?"

The friend held back and Maria went on ahead. The room in which she found herself was a quite small sitting-room where the Prince spent much of his time. It was a room which he loved. A brilliant candelabra lit it with radiance, and through the uncurtained window on to the park she saw a full moon risen, and the towers of the Abbey church in the distance beyond the spreading stretches of parkland. There the Stone of Scone awaited this young man. It was his destiny, his fate. Whatever she did, she must do nothing to stand in his way, so she told herself. Between this house and that stone was wild country, where there were footpads and wicked men, who robbed and murdered. None would cross it after

dark, and would avoid it, for it had been the scene of too many misadventures.

The Prince turned to her. "Adorable lady!" he exclaimed, and lifted her hand to his mouth, and kissed it. She curtsied, and knew that she flushed, for she was agitated. He was a man of strange moods, a man who could be embarrassing and like none other, and she was much dismayed at what was happening to her.

"You are very good to me, Sir."

"I also am a lonely man." He told the story abruptly, and somehow, perhaps he had always wanted to tell it. He had been such a lonely child, and growing up, he had been forced to spend most of the happy hours of playtime in learning. He *was* a lonely man, a *very* lonely man!

Deep sympathy filled her, for she knew how he felt. Her hours of widowhood, already twice in a very short life, had been dismally alone and she knew how oppressive it could become.

"But Sir, you will be the King of England."

"Too many kings are lonely," he told her, and he spoke truthfully. "They never know which men are their true friends, and which their worst enemies. A king must never *be* happy. I am told that the joy dies when he ceases to be the Prince of Wales. But I, who am a Prince of Wales, find a greater joy already born in me this very night! It is the thrill of meeting you." He held her hand, and she shyly waited, not knowing what to do or say. "May I visit you?" he asked her. "May I come to Park Street to see you? At least do not deny me this? Do not break the heart which already beats only for you, and this is true."

He had the power to carry her off her feet, for this was the future King who spoke to her. She knew his reputation well, but how many of us earn false reputations just because we do not know how to avoid them! She had heard of his

childlike jokes, the flippancies, and how readily love warmed that heart of his. Now whatever she did, and however she felt for him, she *must* have a care.

"I could not prevent you, Sir," she said gently. "I do pray that you hesitate to involve me. The world is hard on widows who live alone, and I would never desire that the tongues of gossip should occupy themselves with me."

"I would never desire this, either."

He was, she knew, the most talked-of Prince in Europe, yet when he spoke this way, she could almost gather that he truly cared lest she should be caught up in chatter and gossip. He sought to keep her reputation pure.

"I thank your Royal Highness," she whispered.

"Madam, you must trust me. Have I your assurance that you can do this and will?"

He was very handsome, so fair, and so boyish, with such amazing light blue eyes, too, which danced for the sheer joy of living. It was a shame that he had been so misunderstood as a child; she had always heard that the Queen, his mother, was masterful and cruel, and that the King was quite mad, and before long would have to be 'put aside', as they called it. Again he kissed her hand, promising to call at Park Street, and for the life of her she could not refuse him. She withdrew, gracefully backing from the presence.

Maybe George was not the only one who had already fallen in love!

T W O

POOR PRINCE OF WALES! He had spoken the truth when he had told Maria Fitzherbert of the harshness of his childhood, for it could not have been more difficult for him. He was a very loving little boy, a child who doted on affection, and lived for his mama's kisses. At one moment he was given luscious sweetmeats from the drawer of Mama's dressing-table, and the next soundly slapped for being too demanding. She was touchy in the extreme. Mama admired his good looks, was proud that he had been a son ('*the* son' was the way that she put it), and then later shook him and severely slapped him. In the end he got little comfort from either Papa or Mama.

Archbishop Hurd had been put in charge of his education and had acted forcefully as his tutor, much worried for the future of this utterly charming but self-assertive boy. He was quick to learn, yet, on the other hand, was endowed with that incurable laziness which made life hard for him. He always had to be scolded and punished into applying himself to his work. A youngster with the most beguiling ways, he was good-looking and provocative. He could mature into the most accomplished and endearing Prince in Europe, yet on the other hand he could be a complete rogue, and for the time being Archbishop Hurd deplored the fact that none could possibly predict which way the boy would turn out.

At first he kept his love affairs quiet, only too well aware of the repercussions which they could possibly bring to him.

He had been but eighteen years old when the affair began with the beautiful Mrs. Robinson. He had gone to see her act, and instantly had fallen violently in love with her. He was, so he said, 'The Florizel to her Perdita', and fashionable London nicknamed him Florizel. For a while the news did not spread, but eventually it got to the ears of his scandalised parents. They were shocked to learn that he was having an affair with 'that actress woman', and warned him of all it could entail.

He did not bow to parental will as they would have anticipated, for by now he was out in the world, and had come to learn how public feeling was arrayed against his father. He had lost the American colonies, and this had shocked England. The first signs of oncoming madness were making themselves painfully clear. At first it seemed that he was a trifle eccentric, one of those peculiarities of the royal Georges and therefore not to be criticised too hastily. As yet he had not won himself the atrocious sobriquet of 'The Mad King', but that was round the next corner, and all knew that it was a possibility.

Young George had always thought that his father was difficult, at times pedantic; now, coming out into the world himself, he had to appreciate the idea that he was even more than this.

It would seem that the two elder sons, George, Prince of Wales, and Frederick, Duke of York, were irritated by their father, and none of them got on together. The sons lived a wild life according to their parents, and the King and Queen both disapproved. Now that they advanced to the twenties, they were frequently drunk, neither of them had the royal capacity to hold their drink, as was well known by the outside

world. They were both fond of women, in particular, the Prince of Wales, who now never made the slightest effort to conceal his amorous emotions. Reaching the late teens, and early twenties, willing women friends had appeared on the scene, and his parents were extremely worried as to what in the name of bad fortune would happen next.

George came of age in August 1783, and now there were financial matters to absorb him. He would have a vast income, and do what he wished with it. He had become violently friendly with Charles James Fox, one of those roistering Whigs who was the ideal friend, so the Prince thought. They were devoted.

Fox said that the Prince should have £100,000 a year to fill his position as it should be filled, and this could come from the Civil List. The King was severely shocked at such an idea. There was one of those hard-worked quarrels, and Ministers threatened to resign. The Prince naturally desired this with all his heart and soul. Home life was not too happy at Kew Palace. Mama had her deft finger into every pie, and Papa said nothing save when he flung himself into fits of exaggerated bad temper, when apparently he was almost mad.

Carlton House had been chosen for George, and for the first time he was able to show his exquisite taste in dressing and decorating it. He was a born artist. But he never hesitated when it came to spending money. It was there to be spent, he insisted, and who had a better right to it than had he himself? Ministers again threatened to resign, and all the arguments and tirades, the broken friendships and the indignant disapproval of the country, started to focus on him, which was to last for the whole of this life. Try as he would, and perhaps he never tried too hard, he could not, and he did not, keep out of debt.

Having been given Carlton House, and for the time being

his financial matters being straightened 'out (though not entirely), the Prince now launched into the blissful happiness of lavishly decorating the new home, not caring what he spent.

"I love money, I adore beauty," he said.

"But where will you find the money, Georgie dear?" asked his mama.

"I shall be King one day, and even kings are paid a salary," and he giggled as he said it. She saw that his wicked blue eyes were dancing.

"You will get nothing from me, Georgie," she warned him, though this was not strictly true, for later in his life she came forward and helped him most gallantly, in fact, she really saved the situation for him.

Almost immediately after the country had somewhat recovered from the difficulties of George's colossal decorations and achievements at Carlton House (nothing like them had ever been seen before), further difficulties came to the unhappy parents with these trying royal sons. The two next brothers added to the thorns in the parental crown. The Dukes of Gloucester and Cumberland satisfied themselves by espousing charming, but unroyal widows, who being born in this inferior position could not qualify as princesses. The Duke of Gloucester married Maria, dowager Countess Waldegrave, the illegitimate daughter of Sir Edward Walpole, and Cumberland married the Lady Anne Horton.

All of them had been warned not to do such dreadful things. When they married, their wives must be suitable to take a seat on the Consort's throne if called upon, and the ladies they chose were not on the acknowledged list.

The poor King was worsening. His last act which was made with discrimination and sanity had been the Royal Marriages Act. He had realised that his sons delighted them-

selves in making the most unfortunate marriages, and he stopped it. But after the act was passed he seems to have become worse until even Mama at times wondered for him and begged the doctors to give him medicine to calm him down. The Prince of Wales had hated the new act.

"Now what?" he asked, and added, "My father will want to wed me to some ugly old *Frau* from the *Vaterland*, and she will nag me to my grave."

His friend, Fox, was reassuring. There was lots of time for marriage, he had plenty of brothers to come after him, in fact the urgency of the Prince's marriage was not noticeable.

"I shall marry whom I please," he said.

"Your Royal Highness will *try* to marry whom he pleases," his friends warned him, "but there, do have a care!"

A care was unlikely to disturb George.

In love with beauty, he had superb taste; he adored draperies, delicious pictures, little statues, the cupola and the fountain. He ought to be surrounded by high art. He won some prestige for himself in politics, a thing which princes had not ostensibly done before.

His father seems to have been worried to death about him, and he tried to save him from what he claimed to be his 'ever unfortunate friendships', but this Prince took good advice badly, he wanted to be the Prince who was different. He undoubtedly achieved this, and he was popular. He had a delightful time in London, for the women loved his good manners, his generosity and his elegance. He had come to the end of three dull King Georges, all of whom accepted the pattern of living for kings, and did their duty calmly and little more. Now what was the Prince likely to do? Mrs. Robinson (his Perdita) had come and gone again, and quite unexpectedly the lovely Maria Fitzherbert had appeared on the scene.

She returned a year after her second widowhood, coming into the house in Park Street which her second husband had left her. She was comfortably off, had everything that she could want, and was not a spendthrift in any way. She was a devoted Catholic, entirely adhering to that church and its faith, and nothing would have made her extravagant, or difficult, or in any way a transgressor from that faith. She wished to live a happy normal life. If anyone had told her that the Prince of Wales would seek to be her lover, she would have turned such an idea aside. She did not desire lovers, and anyway she was a Catholic lady and could not look for a husband in any but the Catholic ranks. She had no wish to remarry, and she made this quite clear.

George was one of those young men who are spurred on by the misfiring of one of Cupid's arrows. The idea that the beloved did not love him or did not want him was sufficient for him to become a hundred times more in love. He visited her and loaded her up with invitations to Carlton House; some she accepted, realising that it would be unwise to snub a prince, more especially the heir of the throne. Her kind friend the Duchess of Devonshire guided her through this difficult phase of her life in London.

"This will pass, he will sicken of it," she suggested, "the Prince has never been too steady in his *affaires du coeur*."

The less he saw of her, the more he sought to see. He did not take offence; his easy charm of manner saw him through; but when he became enamoured, nothing in this world would stem his most vigorous ardour.

Maria had been amazed over the introduction, rather swept off her feet, for it was so unexpected, and she had never thought that she would speak to the Prince of Wales. Then she had returned home, and had immediately gone to bed.

The butler had been correct when he had told the visiting Prince that she was not available. When he told her what had happened, the first qualm came to her. Not too aware of what was the proper thing to do, she got in touch with the Duchess of Devonshire, who was kind and slightly warning.

The Prince was known to be flirtatious. He did unusual things, following up introductions in this most strange manner, as had happened with her. She *must* be discreet. Maria had been born discreet, and was most unlikely to make mistakes. The last thing that she desired was to become the centrepiece of royal gossip and chatter. Naturally one side of her nature was flattered by what had happened (what woman would not have felt this primary reaction to such a visitor?), but instantly she appreciated what the Duchess had said. Twice widowed as she was, and a quiet woman, still young enough to be beautiful and attractive—also a most ardent Catholic—all that she could ask of fate was to be allowed to live a quiet life in London society.

She surmised that the Prince would give up this quest. Last night he could have dined and wined too well. She offered all manner of excuses in her heart, and believed that she had heard the end of the story. She was, of course, quite wrong.

The Prince was an insistent young man who, when he wanted his own way, left no stone unturned to get it. He was unlikely to give up heart.

He started to move in a big way. In his world there had been no dignified ladies who made it clear that they did not seek his elegant attentions. But this lady excused herself; she was not oncoming. He tried to discover the people whom she knew, and those parties which would be the most likely to include her as one of the guests. His next move was even more indiscreet, but he *was* an indiscreet young man. He despatched notes to all the best hostesses in London, saying

that he would attend no party unless Mrs. Fitzherbert graced it with her presence!

The news of this was brought to her, and she wept with apprehensive horror.

"I must return to France, I do not wish to stay here," she said.

"Time is your aid, my dear," her friends said. "The Prince does not stay faithful for ever. Wait and see."

"It is dangerous, I am sure," she told them.

"No more dangerous than you need make it, and you will be the height of discretion," they said.

The Duchess of Devonshire was the greatest help. She advised, "If you do nothing, and make no move to meet him, are kind to him when you do meet, but leave it at that, time must be on your side. He is a very impulsive young fellow. Whatever you do, avoid getting involved any more."

Maria responded with infinite calm. She was slightly on the prim side, and the last thing that she could possibly require was trouble with a fly-by-night young man in the important position of Prince of Wales, heir to the throne of England. Possessions and riches would not have impressed her deeply. She knew from what she heard that London laughed at him, yet loved him; the women raved about his good looks, and his lavish generosity, his courage too, for he was a very brave fellow, and his goodness of heart towards people in trouble. All these things were far more apparent to Mrs. Fitzherbert, who had never had much to do with young men; and of course his ebullience, his laughter and his merry joy when meeting her, all intensified her response to him.

He sent her flowers and sweetmeats. He despatched to her invitations to suppers and to parties. He wrote saying that he proposed to give another big ball at Carlton House, where she would enter as queen.

She was horrified, and refused.

She turned again (and now in tears) to the Duchess of Devonshire. "If this continues, there will be no escape left to me, save to return to France, banished there for the rest of my whole life," she protested.

"Be sure it cannot last." The Duchess showed the wisdom of years. "Nothing has lasted more than a short while with this very difficult young man. Someone else always comes along for him, and then that is the end."

"That does not help me now. People must notice what is going on. He keeps running round here with the hope of seeing me. I have told my butler that I am always out. Whatever happens, I *must* always be out."

"Yes, and it will make it wearying for the Prince. In the end you will win the day."

Poor Maria Fitzherbert had never had anything like this happen to her before. She had been an old man's wife, not the young man's love. She was worried at the way the Prince dared to do anything, and *would* do it. "It has got to stop, for it is making me thoroughly wretched," she said, "I should hate to have my name bandied about with his. It would be unthinkable, quite impossible, and entirely wrong. But I am full of pity for him. He has had the most unhappy childhood, both parents were cruelly harsh with him, and I feel that he has never been really happy before."

"If you ask me, he never will be really happy," said the Duchess. "He changes his mind too fast. Anyway there is no reason why he should make *you* unhappy. Surely you ought to be able to appreciate this?"

"His parents were so stern," the sympathetic Maria ventured.

"I expect they were, but at least realise the fact that he must have been a very difficult son to have."

The Prince of Wales remained enchanted by her.

For the first time in his life he had his own palace, his

own ménage, and his own rulings. He could go and come as he chose; he could do what he liked. He enjoyed sowing wild oats, and he did not care what people said about him. The world in general thought that the quiet and extremely beautiful widowed lady who had come to live in London, was part of the Prince's 'wild oats', and here they were entirely wrong. From the first moment that he had met her, he had changed, though it is probably doubtful if, as yet, he knew this himself.

Friends tried to woo him away to other, and more enthralling, wild oats.

"There is only one lady for me," he vowed.

"But the religious difficulties alone would make such a marriage impossible for you! You must know this," they told him.

"Nothing is impossible when one loves." The Prince believed this! In love one was unassailable, and the world bowed its head to please one.

"But this lady happens to be an ardent Catholic, which means that she would *never* change her faith."

"Then I will change mine!" said he brightly, and laughed at them.

"You, Sir, will lose your crown unless you lose your new principles of living," an older man warned him.

"Then, at all costs, I shall keep my love," he defied them. At this stage of the royal love story it really did look as if he would do this.

It was the kindly and much concerned Duchess of Devonshire who made an urgent attempt to put everything right. She had been staying down in Bath, taking the waters, one of the most amiable dissipations of those times.

Now the Prince wrote a private letter to her. He told her that he was deeply in love, and if she would not see him, he was determined to kill himself. Cold horror seized her. She

returned to London and went immediately to Carlton House.

The Prince greeted her, and she had to admit that he really did look extremely ill. He was dressed in a delicious gown, a peignoir of dark red silk, and on it flashed dragons in gold. But she noted the strange sadness of his eyes, the weariness in his manner, and realised that he was quite unlike his former self.

Menservants brought them wine, which she refused; instead she asked for a cup of chocolate surmounted by a peak of whipped cream, which was the vogue of the moment. He told her what had happened.

"The world is hard on me," he maintained, for although most of his troubles were of his making, this was the last thing that he could possibly admit. He had abandoned the passing flirtation, all part of his growing up, he suggested, for now he had met the light of his life, and his one aim was marriage. Maria Fitzherbert was already the queen of his heart, and he intended to make her the Queen of England.

"But really, Sir, that could indeed be extremely difficult for you," she said.

Privately she thought that it would be impossible.

He twitched wretchedly. "I am well aware of the formalities and the absurd rules by which this country would ruin my happiness. It is her faith which stands between us, and I could conform to that faith."

The Duchess was a practical lady, extremely fond of Maria, and her one idea had from the first been to help the lady out of all this. "If you did this, Sir," she reminded him with the utmost calm, "all you would do would be to rob yourself of the crown which you have inherited by the right of birth."

Even he must understand that this was the bitter truth which had to be accepted, though he did not say so. "There are methods of working things," he said, and he was a man who delighted in the gentle art of 'working things' (although

not noticeably efficient in the routine. but he flattered himself that he was).

"You could not do it, Sir," and the Duchess paused.

Now he faced the trouble, for he knew that she was correct in what she said. He was the spoilt child who wanted his own way and was determined to get it. "If I cannot marry the lady of my choice, then I will die," he said, and at this time, in this mood, he actually meant it.

"The country, Sir. Think of the country which commands that you shall live to reign over them?"

Despairingly he asked, "What do I care? I love Maria. I desire her above all things in this world, and without her, life will be death for me."

The distressed Duchess, now considerably perturbed, went home in her chair and visited her friend en route. She felt that given time and disappointment the naughty Prince would change his tactics. Another fair charmer would come along. Obviously he could not marry Mrs. Fiztherbert, and just as obviously he could not commit suicide. That was the one comforting thought!

When Maria heard what had happened she was deeply unhappy. Under all her outer emotions, she was deeply attracted to the young Prince. Her first *young* lover, a charmer who was sad owing to his position, and who was delightfully unusual. But she wanted no feverish love affair. The man could never marry her, and his associations would come into severe comment from her church. With Maria, her church always came first. She was fortunate in having the loyal friendship of the Duchess of Devonshire who would do everything she could to help her.

"He will get over it, of course," the Duchess said. "He is one of those highly impetuous young men who do this sort of thing, and when he finds it is really no good at all, in the end he will go off to pastures new."

"But this does not help me now."

They sat talking together in the very pretty green and white sitting-room in Mrs. Fitzherbert's home, a sweet parlour where they could exchange confidences. The Duchess spoke of her own knowledge of the young man, and admitted that it was cruel to condemn him too readily. He had endured the most difficult childhood, with a martinet of a mother, and—she had to whisper the last—"a madman for a father!" He was free and alone for the first time in his life, naturally he would go a little wild. One must forgive him. He did not intend to upset her.

The affairs came and went. There had been one unbelievable night at the opera, when the Prince had threatened to fling himself out of the royal box, and dash himself to death in the stalls below for love of a ballet dancer who had refused the elegant flowers which he had sent her, and had—so he said—broken his heart. Possibly his upbringing had unbalanced him. Possibly he had to fling himself about in an exaggerated manner, and do reckless, rather schoolboy, things because he was so unhappy about his whole life. Yet he would have hated *not* to be the Prince of Wales, the future King of England. He loved power.

His mama said, "Georgie does silly things. He will grow out of it in time, and learn better, and he is a kind son."

Maria understood him. She found herself clinging to this strange young man who had had innumerable affairs which had come to nothing, and was easily able to take his own life for some passing mistress, if he were given the chance.

She had no wish to return to live in the south of France as she had done before, and to spend the rest of her life there. England was her native country; she had been born and bred here, and she loved it. As yet she thought of living quietly and giving the Prince time to settle down. Surely his

ardour would cool? and at any time he might inherit the crown, when he would have to steady himself.

In her own simple way Maria was beginning to love him; it was that dauntless love which is built on pity, deep understanding, and the longing to help. She intended to live quietly here, gently snubbing the Prince's bursting enthusiasm, and waiting for the moment when he cooled down, and she felt that this must happen.

Alas, it was not as easy as this. His Royal Highness was not the sort of petulant young man to be set aside so simply. If she had ideas as to their future, *so had he!*

The worst happened.

T H R E E

ON THE night of July the ninth, 1784, things took place which changed everybody's outlook, and seemed to be completely terrifying.

Maria Fitzherbert had had a rather bad day when she had been afflicted with the migraine from which at times she suffered badly. It had distressed her. She had spent most of the time on the bed, sipping lemon and water, and attended by her faithful maid; then, with evening, she had gone for a walk in her own attractive little garden. Her maid who devoted her life to the lady, told her that there was thunder coming up from the west; the heat had not lifted with nightfall as everyone had said it would, and Maria went early to bed.

She took her time about it, for she felt most unwell, and was not yet undressed when her butler, looking extremely anxious, came up to tell her that three gentlemen had called, and would not go away. They were on the Prince's staff, and said that the matter was very urgent. They could not leave without seeing her, as they had the most serious message to give her. The men were the surgeon from the court, whose name was Keate, Lord Onslow, and Lord Southampton. She knew all of them, and had frequently met them at Carlton House. They were honourable people, cool, calm and collected, and she was well aware that they would not disturb her unless something vital had happened.

"I can see none," she insisted.

This was, so they said, no ordinary matter, and they simply must have an audience with her. In the end she became aware of the fact that something very serious was afoot, and she went out to speak to them. She looked deathly ill and white, her eyes dark with the pain, yet the second she entered her own pretty parlour, she realised that this *was* no ordinary event.

"I do entreat your Lordships to make the matter brief," she asked them, "for I have suffered from the migraine all day, and am retiring for the night."

Lord Onslow acted as spokesman.

He said that today the Prince had been mournful and deeply depressed that his love affair with Mrs. Fitzherbert was making no progress. All his gentlemen had noticed that he was more than unhappy, he was frantic with it. He had protested that with matters as they were, he could not go on living, and would take his own life. This was a favourite threat of his, but on this occasion he had been far more serious, and Lord Onslow was distressed for him.

She said, "I do pray, sirs, that we do not repeat words which have already been said too often. I have told His Royal Highness that any thought of marriage between us is entirely out of the question. He knows this. It is plain that his marriage must be with a lady in his own position of life, and one who is adherent to the faith of this country. I would not forfeit my own faith for anything in this world. He knows this to be true."

Lord Onslow delayed her. "Please, Madam, hear us out, for the time is short, and this is very great trouble. We argued with His Royal Highness, and he began to be considerably upset, and retired to his own room. Half an hour later his servants called to him, for he had stabbed himself severely, vowing that if he could not marry your sweet self, then he

would marry none, and cease to live. He had thrust a dagger into his breast."

Poor Maria was horrified.

She stared at Lord Onslow, scarcely able to appreciate the words that he was saying, and she had gone sheet-white. "He—he is dead?" she asked, after a moment.

"No Madam, thank God that he is still alive, and in the good offices of Mr. Keate, the surgeon; but he *is* dangerously ill. He is in a very bad state, and this is true."

For a moment she did not speak, but her eyes watched them beseechingly. Then she said, "But to do such a thing to oneself is murder."

Lord Onslow spoke again. "His Royal Highness would rather commit murder than live without you, Madam. He protests this. He does not ask to live," he said.

She broke down then, weeping bitterly, and she urged them to tell her what hope there was for him, how he really was, and if the stab was severe, and could it kill him? Had everything been done that could be done? What would they do next? It was Lord Onslow who tried to comfort her.

"For the moment, Madam, the doctors have stemmed the worst of the bleeding, which *was* severe, but you have to realise that he is seriously ill. He implored us to fetch you to him. The truth is that he could be dying, and surely you would not refuse to console him in his last hours?"

She stared at him in dismay. For a moment her lips made the movements of words, but no sound came from her. Then she whispered, "He—he cannot die. I will pray for him. I do not believe that God will let him die."

"Men die from lesser wounds than this which His Royal Highness has inflicted on himself," they told her, and she was distracted. She did not know what to do.

Commonsense warned her not to get herself committed to anything so extraordinary, but already she was deeply in

love with this attractive Prince, and she could not stay her own emotions for him. She longed to comfort and console him. How could she afford to let him suffer, and die alone?

"What can I do?" she asked. Now the tears were streaming down her white face, and she made no attempt to stop them. Undoubtedly the men before they ever came to her had decided what it was they wanted her to do. The Prince had commanded that they brought his love to him. She must return with them. But they had not thought of her common-sense, Maria was a woman who had both feet on the ground. She intended to break none of the social rules of those times, nor would she do anything foolish. She said so.

"Come to him, Madam, and save his life, the country would ask this of you," Lord Onslow implored her. "You cannot let him die for love of you like this, he needs your encouragement and goodness of heart to make him live."

She stood there helplessly, looking from one to the other. Naturally, she believed everything they said, but it did seem that life was conniving against her. How could she, a completely truthful woman, disbelieve these gentlemen? It was a most extraordinary situation.

"I cannot possibly go to visit the Prince alone," she said rather desperately. "Some other lady must come with me. It would be improper for me to be unchaperoned. Perchance the Duchess of Devonshire . . .?" and her voice broke.

It was Lord Southampton who volunteered to fetch the Duchess. They appreciated that it was only reasonable for the young lady to ask for a chaperone, for this was the era of proper chaperonage in full, but whether the amiable Duchess would permit herself to become closely involved in such an unpleasant affair, they rather doubted. Lord Southampton went off to persuade the Duchess to accompany them.

"We must not delay too long. The Prince is seriously ill,

and time is ebbing out," Mrs. Fitzherbert was told.

She sent for her maid to bring a cloak for her, and prepared herself. Possibly she had made up her mind that even if she had to go unchaperoned, go she must. She was weeping bitterly, an emotional woman now shattered on his behalf. She believed that the Prince was dying, and knew now that she loved him passionately. She would give everything to save his life. She pardoned all his childish errors in living life, and the silly mistakes which poor George found it so easy to make. He had had a hard mother, a disciplinarian who would take no nay, and his father *was* the mad King.

Her maid put the cloak round her, and she was told that the Duchess was awaiting her, and so was escorted out to the coach. The two women met with little emotion, for both were distracted with anxiety. The story seemed to be a curious one. The main urgency was that everything must be kept a dead secret for the time being. Whatever happened not a word of it must leak out. Maria took her seat beside the Duchess, and they drove off.

"You are doing the right thing," her friend told Maria, "by going to him you will probably save his life, and this is vital. It should be your great reward."

It is possible that the Duchess was getting more than a little tired of this royal gentleman's trickeries and foibles, his maddening love affairs, and the way he apparently expected life to move entirely to suit himself.

"I am so afraid," Maria wept as they bowled along.

"Don't believe everything that you see and hear," begged the Duchess, "I am not at all happy about this story as yet. Remain calm. Keep your tears for later on, when you are sure that they are needed."

The carriage drove into the courtyard of Carlton House. Maria could not stay her tears; at the end of a tormenting day with migraine, this was too much, but what could she do? She

could not imagine how the Prince had been driven to anything so drastic, and perchance so final.

The door quickly opened for them, for they were expected, and they went into the magnificent home of the Prince, to find the whole place in a wild state of anticipation. Nobody actually knew any details, but the whole purport seemed to be that the Prince in one of his sadder moods had decided that life without Maria was too much for him, and had tried to commit suicide.

Something had to be done immediately to prevent this most extraordinary news from travelling about, to save the royal life, and to hush up any unpleasant details. The Duchess of Devonshire was the most controlled of them all; she said that she would do anything that she could to help them, but at the same time she *was* slightly scandalised by the ridiculous behaviour of the over-romantic Prince.

The major-domo received them and led them up the magnificent staircase. Poor Maria now felt so ill that she hardly knew what she was doing. They went through one of the state rooms, an ante-room and a dressing-room, and then through the double doors with the three white feathers elegantly poised above them. The Prince was one of those men who missed nothing in the way of ostentation, and although his home was quite superlatively furnished, it had some very strange corners to it.

As the inner doors opened, they could see him, propped up in bed by heavy white pillows. The bed was hung with dark red velvet curtains, all tasselled. He breathed noisily, had obviously been stabbed and wounded, and there were the dark stains of blood on the coverlet, and the smell of it in the room. He groaned from time to time, and those who were with him were deeply concerned. He had always been a very difficult child and man; one was never quite sure if he spoke the truth, or used that wild exaggeration of his which could be so

extremely dangerous. He had never been really reliable, not someone whom one could trust, but in spite of all this, he had an enchanting nature and was loved.

"Maria!" he gasped.

Poor Maria was overcome with that deep sympathy of which she had such a store. She always felt deeply for others, and now she went to the bed, curtsied, and knelt beside him.

"George? George?"

This was of course exactly what he wanted! His mother would have treated the situation much better, for she would have slapped him severely. Possibly he knew that! He put out a slender be-ringed hand, and stroked her hair. He had sufficient strength left to declare—and quite firmly—that if the lady whom he adored did not wed him officially, then he would do the same thing again, only this time he would make a better job of it, and be sure that the action killed him. He spoke of St. George's Chapel at Windsor, along the road of no return. There was no doubt about it that this young man had ever been adept at laying it on.

At the same time it was obvious that he was still having a great deal of pain, for Maria could see him wincing every little while. She was brave. Recovering from her first anguish, she realised that the Prince's condition had been more than a little exaggerated to her. He was certainly not dying, but he *was* seriously ill. He panted hard. At times he gasped, and now he insisted that unless she promised to marry him, he would end his life before the morning came. He was such a strange personality, that she thought it highly likely that he could do something absurd.

She wept bitterly.

"I implore you to have the wisdom not to do something which is entirely against your faith," she told him. "Life is not ours to end as we will. It rests with God."

"At the same time we can end it if it becomes too much," said the Prince.

"We can, but it is something that we must never do, for it is murder, and a mortal sin. England needs you as their King," she told him. "You must live, it is your duty to give sons to this country, to wear your crown after you."

"That is nothing to me . . . nothing . . ." he told her, and groaned.

"The country wants you."

"I have brothers, many brothers, and all of them can be the King, if it comes to them. They can provide the country with an heir. All I ask is peace, and the happiness of loving my own love!"

"But this is wrong. Utterly wrong," she said.

"What have I left to live for?"

"Surely Your Royal Highness desires that I should be proud of your royal courage," she said.

The night was deepening. She knew that those around her felt that it was not good for the Prince to be continuing this prolonged discussion, and Mr. Keate knew it. Lord Onslow begged Mrs. Fitzherbert not to delay matters; a life, a very great one, could be in serious danger, what could they do next? Why not agree to whatever the patient said, so as to enable him to get the night's rest which was imperative for him? She still tried reasoning, but this was the man who was accustomed to getting his own way, and most insistent about it. His mama would have done better. She felt that if she refused him, most certainly he would keep his word, and what would she do if it ended in a lying-in-state at Westminster?

She was tired out. Not only was she exhausted by everything that had happened, but by the awful day with migraine wearing her to shreds.

"Give me time . . . George . . . I have to think," she besought him.

Naturally, he knew this would be dangerous. The night was rapidly advancing, and he shook his head.

"It is now or never. Exhausted by everything that has happened, I would rather die than be kept in this misery. I have no wish to live if we cannot wed. It is now or never. I tell you that. This is the hour of my great happiness, or the end and eternity. Death is the quickest way out of this most dreadful scene. None would want me to live without my love."

The Duchess of Devonshire did her best to comfort him and make him see sense. She turned to the distracted Maria, and whispered, "Let us say anything to calm him now, and get him to sleep. Anything for the moment, or we shall be here all night long. I can see this."

Possibly at this minute the poor girl realised that she was now desperately in love with him and would do anything in the world to help him. He was charming; he was good-looking; and in spite of his many ridiculous faults he was amusing, gay and kind. She put her cheek against his, a cheek wet with the tears he had caused her. "I love you," she whispered brokenly.

He had been waiting for this.

She could not bear the thought of the cold cruelty of death for him, for she had seen two husbands die. He was so young. The warmth of that human sympathy of which she had such abundant store, moved within her. She could never love any other man as she loved this Prince, yet their marriage was impossible.

"I love you," she whispered again.

"Then you will marry me? It matters not if we starve, if only we love each other. Crowns are not important, the caring for each other is the urgency," and then in a burst of eagerness, for now he seemed to be overcoming his accident, "I'd crowns resign to call thee mine . . ."

For her the migraine had suddenly lifted and it had gone. Had a new brightness come into this magnificent room where a future king lay? It was a superb moment. She wept, of course, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"Nothing save marriage that was legal could make me thine," she told him, and this was the truth. She was never a woman who would have stepped aside from the edicts of her church. Probably he realised this, but he himself was so full of delicious trickeries (though he did not call them that), that he felt sure that something could be arranged. There was a way out, and he abided by this thought.

"It shall be arranged," he promised.

He borrowed a ring to slip on to her finger lest when she had gone she should seek to go back on her word. He laid it there and kissed it into place. Maria hardly knew where she was.

"I will be faithful unto death," he vowed, for vows came easily with this man, "I promise never to be unfaithful to my own devoted Maria."

"And I to you," she said, "but I cannot wed you without the blessing of my church."

"The blessing of your church shall bring us together," he told her, and quite possibly in that hour he meant it.

Night was now moving on to the early dawn, and people would soon be about the streets. Naturally she had no liking to be seen, and she must get home before this happened. If the lights still shone all over Carlton House—and they did—undoubtedly the servants chattered about what was happening. But it was now that the kind Duchess who was chaperoning Maria, insisted that she returned to Park Street.

They drove back. Once they had got away from the pompous atmosphere of Carlton House, the Duchess was adamant. Nothing on earth must persuade dear little Maria to permit herself to be dragged into one of those so-called marriages

which had already been associated with this flirtatious Prince. Now, she urged, the girl must write a note to this effect. She must sign a statement with the Duchess which said that promises obtained in such circumstances were utterly and entirely void. Her church would back her in this.

When Maria got back into her own bed, she was quite bewildered. Before she snatched a brief sleep, which she badly needed, she ordered that her trunks must be packed, and they must make a move to the coast. With the coming of the new day, she appreciated the danger which could threaten her. Commonsense reminded her that it would be impossible for her to stay on in England with this hanging over her. She was a Catholic girl, now affianced to the Protestant Prince of Wales, whose children must all be Protestant. What else could she do but flee the country?

She would be away before the news got around, and every household would discuss what had happened, over the morning chocolate. In no circumstances dare she risk meeting George again.

She must have detested leaving a city which she loved, and where she had been so superbly happy, but what else could she do? She summoned her maid to pack the things and said she would sleep for an hour; but before the dawn finally broke she wanted her coach to be at the door.

She rose later, the sky pink with the new day, and within a brief space of time she and her maid were travelling along the road to the coast as fast as the horses could take her.

When it came, the salty scent of the sea enlivened and cheered her a little. Before the day grew hot she was in a small steamer commandeered for her, and crossing to the French coast in tears. Maria Fitzherbert, the fiancée of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, had left England, and believed it to be for ever.

There could be no return.

I will try to shed few tears, she promised herself, I will be wise about it, but her heart bled.

F O U R

THE STORY was put about that Mrs. Fitzherbert had become exhausted with the entertaining and all the commitments of a lavish London season, and she had left the country and was off to take a rest in Paris.

The Prince took the news extremely badly. It was brought to him by Lord Onslow, much perturbed that he would suffer for it, for he should have done something to stay the flight. But he had never thought that it was round the next corner.

At first the Prince raged, sent for his dagger, called for a sword, and prayed for poison! His staff were well accustomed to these little flights of fancy, and realised that, given time, he would cool down, only to hatch some new scheme whereby the story would be 'continued in our next'.

The actual news arrived when the flowers which he had ordered to be immediately delivered to the lady when she woke the next morning, met with trouble. They were cream roses and lilies-of-the-valley, with his name attached, and they were brought back to him at Carlton House with news that the lady had left London, and the house was being shut up.

"But she can't have gone! She was here with me last night," he insisted.

He then started one of his most turbulent fits of rage, which alone proved that last night's scars, even if they had bled nobly, had not gone very deep. He threw things about. He

blasphemed, behaving much like his father, as he very frequently did. He threatened real suicide this time!

In the middle of it all, a special messenger appeared bringing with him the ring which had been borrowed for the lady last night, and the message that she had no further use for it, for she was leaving for France, and would be on the high seas by the time His Royal Highness read her letter.

There was another scene.

But whatever he said or did, there was the one lamentable fact, Mrs. Fitzherbert had left the country. He had not got the chance to do the same thing, for to leave England he had to get the permission of his father the King. By now news of a little of what had happened would have reached Kew Palace, so that was the permission which the King would never give him.

The thought was thoroughly enraging.

The shutters were drawn across the windows of the house in Park Street, and although the Prince got in touch with the Duchess of Devonshire, she professed a polite ignorance of where 'dear Maria' had gone. She had been a little tired, she explained, and thought that Paris would refresh her.

The Prince was almost despairing, but now, without the main member of the audience, and impossible to be brought back to him, another suicide attempt would be merely ridiculous.

He wrote saying that the ring had in his eyes represented true marriage, and he signed the letter not only as 'your most affectionate lover', but also as 'the tenderest of husbands'.

No reply came to him.

He then despatched wild letters, and sent couriers. The news got out, of course, and London laughed about it, and Paris laughed more! All sorts of stories were twisted round it, and Mrs. Fitzherbert had done wisely to escape.

Because the atmosphere was more than he could bear, the

Prince went off to Brighton, of which he was particularly fond. He enjoyed sea bathing, though since he had grown stouter, he felt that he presented something of a figure of fun. He drove a 'tim-whisky' racing across the Downs, and made curious expeditions in the evening to the Lanes. There he sang songs, danced with local belles, and kept working men and women awake, until in a fury some flung open the windows and threw full chamber pots over the heir to the throne and his misguided friends.

Nothing stemmed his exuberance once he recovered a little from the first blow.

Nothing held him back. Half of him mourned, as a widower, his darling who had now disappeared, apparently for ever; but the other half was getting over it, and there were signs of his old coquettishness, his gaiety and the spontaneity of an adolescent boy.

His friend Mr. Fox made a valiant effort to console him, but this was not the sort of consolation he sought. He was occupying himself with the Pavilion which was going to be a masterpiece of loveliness, the most splendid palace in all the world, he said, and no expense would be spared, no work left undone on it.

The fact that he could not afford it never occurred to him. Any expense was justifiable for the Prince of Wales.

Now he felt that he must do something to banish his miseries, and forget the dreadful interlude with Mrs. Fitzherbert, and how she had deserted him. He heard about her from time to time, had written to her, but his letters received no answer. She stayed for a time at Aix-la-Chapelle, then went on a visit to the court of Orange, for she had always been fascinated by Holland, with the canals, the art treasures, and the delicious smallness of it all. She was far away, but maybe this was for the best.

About this time she discovered that the very able Mr. Fox

was making efforts to console the Prince's broken heart. From what she gathered he went through a series of various and bewildering different moods. He was playing absurd practical jokes when staying down at Brighton, and behaving like some overgrown schoolboy. Then there were other times when he suffered from those deep depressions, and would lay him down to die, declaring that life was worthless and his own life should end.

Mr. Fox, however, was a keen friend, and he behaved well to the Prince. He felt that something could surely be arranged, whereby the anxiety of King George the Third and the languishing love of the Prince of Wales, could both be ultimately satisfied.

There were such things as morganatic marriages, and surely the House of Hanover had had a varied experience of them? On the whole, the sons of King George the Third were singularly morganatically minded, but of course it was different when the bridegroom concerned was the heir to the throne.

Possibly the greatest worry of them all was the religious leaning of the lady in question. The one thing that Maria Fitzherbert would obviously never change was the faith which directed her away from mortal sin, and to marry the Prince in the present circumstances would have *been* mortal sin. Nothing would ever induce her to alter her faith, or to do anything in any manner adverse to its teaching.

She was now abroad, and after a period of something which verged on acute despair, was recovering a little. She was no longer harassed to death, losing weight, and looking so sad that it made people weep to see her. She had always been in love with him, for he had great charm. She loved, but must forget, and although she knew that she had given her heart to a Prince who was, she was sure, in need of real affection, she had passed out of his life.

Having got this far, and learning that he was fairly composed to the situation—though still making desperate efforts to get in touch with her—she calmed down. She liked France, and loved the district in which she was living, and the new friends which she made. Probably she believed that time was her true friend, and time itself would relieve the strange unreasonableness of the Prince. She must wait.

Whatever happened, she would never become his mistress, this was certain. She had said this firmly, and quite clearly, and she intended to abide by it.

This was the lady who had done the right thing all along, and by the prompt measure which she had taken in leaving the country, had arranged to walk her courageous path entirely alone. She doubted if she could ever love another, but for his own sake he must abandon this impossible quest. In love with him, of course (and she was not alone in this for he was the most attractive man in every way, and so entertaining, which was a tremendous attribute), she remembered all his gay little quips, his audacious ideas of amusing himself, and his gaiety. But she also recalled, and with some agony of mind, those hours when he suffered from the most severe melancholia, and always had done, ever since he grew up.

His emissaries constantly approached her. The fear that they expressed was that so devoted and so desolate a lover might do himself a mischief if left so much alone. He sought companionship, the care of a woman, and those hours which they had so much enjoyed together, when hand-in-hand somehow words had not seemed to be necessary.

The men who approached her about the deep sadness which at moments engulfed the once so gay Prince, moved her heart. Could she do nothing to help him? she was asked, for she was the only person in the world who could help, they were sure. She remembered the sadness which at times harassed him, wept for him, and in the end, when she was approached

by his friends, she tried to meet him halfway, as some sort of comfort. She was persuaded to write out a promise that she would never marry any other man, and this was taken to him.

Undoubtedly she knew her man! Instantly he believed that she was privately melting and would perhaps consent to one of those morganatic marriages in which it would appear that most of his brothers indulged so happily.

The King pressed his eldest son to wed. The son devoted himself to various extraordinary trimmings-up of the Pavilion at Brighton.

"I will never wed," he declared, and this was what he actually meant at the time. "For me there is but one lady in the land, and she has been denied to me."

Fox tried to persuade him. "This marriage is impossible, and you must know it, sire. She is of the wrong faith, and this is the most deadly sin in your father's eyes; she is not royal and has been wed before. Twice. Other men have known her, so what could you expect?"

"Being widowed is not a sin," said the indignant Prince.

He felt that the whole world was against him, and the only thing to do was to cut his throat, and find himself permanently resting at Windsor. He said so with vehemence.

At this time the unfortunate Maria was rapidly becoming more and more anxious. When they had parted and she had believed this was for ever, she had discovered that she was desperately in love with her Prince. She adored him. Love is not something one can change; it refuses to bow to rules and social demands. Had he been in her own position, and a good Catholic, never for a single moment would she have held back. But unhappily for her, nothing happened this way. She had had a long desperate talk with the Duchess of Devonshire, her friend.

The Duchess thought very little of the Prince. She would never forget the night when she had accompanied Mrs. Fitzherbert to Carlton House, where he was presumed to have stabbed himself because he was in love.

"He can never marry you," she had said, "and you would not want a morganatic marriage."

"My church would not permit it," and she said it with truth.

"Then why continue with an affair in which there can be no future? Anyway no future that conforms to your own feelings."

Maria wept. "I love him," she admitted.

That, as the Duchess could have told her, had been the misfortune of many women, and he was not the most reliable lover in the world. What did one do next?

"Of course you love him, he is the most attractive and marriageable young man in the whole country, but he is *not* reliable." The Duchess felt that it was about time that her friend appreciated there was no future for her with the Prince. The hour would come when possibly his debts ran him into difficulties with Parliament, and in managing the matter for him they would possibly press him to marry a Princess of the blood royal, and produce heirs to the throne. Then Maria's heart would be broken. "The end of all this can only be disaster for you," said the Duchess, "and if you have any wisdom you will end it."

Maria wept a trifle. "To lose him would be to lose my own life," she whispered.

"But to lose him is in the end, inevitable. All of us can see this, surely you realise it? He never keeps his word. Flirting comes easily to him."

"Yes," Maria agreed, "but he had such an unbearable childhood. Surely the hour is fast approaching when his father dies, or when his condition becomes so trying that they can

no longer let him reign as King? That is when things will change."

"At the same time he is not permitted to marry into any faith but the Church of England, *and* a lady of royal birth."

"I know." Maria sighed heavily. She had no wish to become a burden to the man whom she loved, and under these conditions she saw herself as being exactly this. But she saw him in an entirely different way from others. To her he was at moments an absurd young fellow who loved dressing-up and showing-off. He had this double-sided nature, a pitying man, a kind man, but a joker who could never stay himself from giggling at the sort of joke in which he revelled. She knew his utter helplessness.

"He needs someone to care for him," she said, "someone who understands that half of him is a child, and not a naughty, but a very playful one."

"You would have thought that he had been sufficiently slapped," murmured her friend.

"He needs love," said Maria gently.

"You will only get your heart broken for your pains," replied the Duchess.

It was true, of course. Even Maria must have realised that there was a big chance of this, and trembled for herself. The Duchess had hoped that she would outgrow her love for the man whom she could never marry, though she realised also that Maria was right. The Prince *needed* a kindly wife, someone who would never rail at him, as his parents had done, but who would advise him wisely, and lead him inside at complete peace.

"His father's harshness broke him," she told her friend.

"I wonder?" and the Duchess laughed. But she did realise that it might be unwise to get herself further entangled with the love story of what appeared to her to be two impossible people.

In desperation Marie had left England, for she felt this to be the wisest course. She doubted if she would ever find peace in a country where at any moment His Royal Highness could swoop down on her, and command an audience. She would travel. Maybe pastures new could offer her a happier life. Now he seemed to be even more restless and unhappy than he had been before, and she felt distraught about it.

I cannot return, she told herself.

It was spring overseas. In the south of France the colourful anemones flowered in whole fields of ice-white, vivid royal blue and purple, and that abundant cerise much like the royal robes which crowned heads wore.

The mimosa blossomed everywhere, entrancing with its soft scent, and the Judas trees were already flowering in claret blossoms along the leafless branches. Never had the whole of the countryside looked prettier than it did now, and never had the poor lady been hungrier for real beauty.

Warmed by the audacious sunshine, and sitting on amiable little verandas, wreathed by plumage in cerulean blue, and the colour of the summertime skies, she now looked back and wondered if she had acted wisely. Had she the right to walk out of her lover's life? She had been seriously upset by the attempted suicide, and more so by the messages which came almost every day to her from the faithful Prince. He was not cooling from the affair, as she had anticipated would happen. Being out of sight, she should have been out of mind, she would have believed, but he was still both eager and responsive.

Had she done the wrong thing after all, deserting him in the hour when he most needed her? There were distressing moments when she wept for him. He was a loving and an adorable man, who had suffered much. A playboy, of course, but she with the ready sweetness of her nature forgave this so readily. She knew now that she herself was in love with the

man who could not afford to marry her, yet would be for ever broken-hearted if she did not help him, and wed him.

Leaving England in the first panic of reaction, she may have thought that one can run away from love, but this is not so.

Now, sitting here, she thought of her sweet little house on Richmond Hill, of the comfortable house where he had wooed her in Park Street, and she believed that life was too complex for her.

England would never stand for a Catholic Queen. She thought of the poor little second wife of King James the Second, who had reigned with him as a Catholic, fighting the most extraordinary disadvantages and wretchedly unhappy. She thought of that little Queen with pathos. How ultimately she had returned to her own homeland, and although she was never a nun, she worked for the convent and was buried in their habit, as if she had taken the vows.

England was not good to Catholic Queens.

But now, dreaming with homesickness of him, flattered by the little *gages d'amour* which he sent, the long eloquent letters (and the Prince wrote very long protesting letters), possibly her meticulous behaviour made it all the harder for him. Her discretion was perfect. She never forced the situation in any way, but did her best to help him remain as a good son, and an excellent Prince of Wales.

'He was born to the throne,' she told herself, 'it is his heritage, and I must efface myself from his world.'

Under it all, his love for her stayed. There were constant gifts, frequent tokens came to her, and those long letters, which told of his love for her, his devotion, and his insistence that it would never die.

I love you, Maria, was what he wrote.

The Duke of Gloucester was travelling abroad with his wife, and he went out of his way to call on Mrs. Fiztherbert.

She entertained them both. The Gloucesters were kind to her, and she deeply appreciated this. She was, of course, extremely lonely, and longing for kind friends, which made their visit all the sweeter to her. He and his wife were again one of those curious marriages which are not marriages. It was a difficult time to live in, an era to which poor Maria knew that she was unfitted. She could not marry the Prince, though she now realised that she desired it beyond everything else in the world. If she married him as things were, then she acted against her religion, and this was one of the things that she would never do. It would have to be conducted by the laws of her church, or she must put him out of her life for ever. She would never be yet another of the royal mistresses.

Her agony of mind came to an end when she wrote to the Prince to this effect. Terribly afraid that there could be a repetition of that ghastly incident when he had tried to commit suicide on her behalf, she knew that this must be avoided. To put his mind at rest, she sent him her word. It was her promise. She would remain for ever his love, even though they could never wed.

In England things calmed down a little. The Prince met other ladies and of course flirted with them. His father teased him about 'his loves'; his mother was wiser with him. But the often unhappy Prince was growing desperate. He had the bright idea of going to The Hague for a time, but this was stopped. Had England become a cage to him? It looked remarkably like this. Also now he was being pressed to wed. It was high time, said the politicians. "You should marry, George, that would put everything right," said his mama. He wished to marry, but there was only one woman who could ever be his wife, and he adhered to this. The Prince was friendly with Maria's family, and had gone out of his way to make friends with them. In particular, there was her uncle, Mr. Errington, the man who had hoped to introduce them

to each other on the steps of the Opera, but Maria, scenting danger, had discreetly fled.

The Prince informed her mother that he intended to marry her; he constantly said so. He knew that she was now bored with living overseas, in truth she was lonely, and longed for some of her old friends, for her comforts, and the feeling that she was home again.

It was 1785 when things came to a head. The Prince had called into the argument every one of his friends who could help. Now he had something at the back of his head which he felt might bring about their marriage after all. He wrote glowingly and said—

Nothing now is wanting but the arrival of my adored wife in this country to make me the happiest of men . . .

She could bear no more, and six weeks later she came home.

Suddenly she could go no further. She was deeply in love with him, and wretchedly lonely, but the marriage must be legal. She would do nothing underhand, nothing disloyal, nothing which could in any way upset others. Her whole attitude seemed to change, and quite gently. Her love for him was too great, and she was returning here to marry the old love, and to live happily ever after; it would be legal in the eyes of the Protestant *and* the Catholic people. She and the Prince met again and he urged his suit.

"At all costs it must be legal," the lady said, with tears in her eyes.

"But of course!" The light blue eyes of the enraptured Prince were for a moment hazed by anxiety. "And I will make you a Duchess."

She stayed him. "Not that. Never that. I am happy as I am, very happy. I ask only to be your true wife."

“And that is what I *will* make you.”

Possibly she knew that he meant this, for he was a very charming man, but the fact that later on he would not be able to adhere to it, was one which she blurred over. Maria wanted to believe in him. At this stage I am sure that she did, and she trusted him. She herself was entirely reliable when it came to promises, and now so much in love with the young man that I doubt if it would have been possible for her to *mistrust* him.

But there were grim difficulties, which now presented themselves. Reputable people did not wish to get themselves entangled in an affair which they could not bring themselves to believe would be honest. The King's sons were for ever marrying—they said properly—ladies with whom they wished to live, and a little later on drifting amiably out of it.

The first clergyman to whom the Prince wrote, excused himself humbly, by saying that he could not possibly do this. He admitted that he was properly scared of ‘the serious consequences’ and had no wish to tempt providence. Besides, he could not see how it could be made legal.

“He is not worth considering,” the Prince told his love when she asked what he had said. She sighed.

“We must realise that whatever happens, we shall have a large proportion of the world against us.”

“But why? Not for the world would I suggest anything but a true marriage. You know that,” and then, with real passion, “I adore you. I seek your company as my wife for ever. And if they will not let you come to the throne, and share it with me, then let them put a flame to their throne. I don't care!”

He laughed enthusiastically. Somehow his courage and his joy were infectious. She loved him enormously. She wanted him for ever. What was worse was the fact that she trusted him.

The next clergyman lived in Bushey Park, and a messenger from Carlton House brought him to visit the Prince. He had no idea what all this was about. At first the conversation drifted amiably amongst pleasantries, the Prince being almost *too* amiable and delightful. The new man, his name was Knight, could not imagine why he was here at all, and became more and more alarmed. Eventually, when he heard the reason, he was even more alarmed, and hated the idea. He said that he felt it could only lead to all manner of difficulties. How was it possible to make the marriage legal, both here in England, and with Rome? Even though the eager Prince promised that he would support the priest to the bitter end should anything disagreeable ensue, this failed to satisfy the priest. The Prince did not know what to do.

Finally the Prince did persuade him, but this luck did not last for long, for when the gentleman returned to Bushey Park after what had seemed to him to be an unending visit, he thought it over and then sat down to write to the Prince asking to be excused. He wished to have no associations with a plan which he felt was impossible to pursue legally, and which would call down the wrath of all upon him.

The Prince flew into a violent passion.

"What do I do?" he asked Mrs. Fitzherbert.

She could not help him. She was aghast that people could be so difficult, for she had thought that they would be able to settle down to a reasonable and legal alliance; but it was madness to employ any priest whose heart was not with them.

"I will find someone," said George, and he did.

In the long run one of his secretaries helped him. By accident he discovered what was afoot. It was this man who found out that it was not legally necessary to have a Catholic priest to perform the ceremony, or even to be there. It was true that the Royal Marriages Act did lay down that marriages

without the sovereign's permission were null and void, but this was purely from the civilian legal side. Mrs. Fitzherbert's urgent demand was that this should be legal from the side of her church. And most conveniently the act laid down the fact that if children came later, then they would be illegal but not illegitimate. The royal lovers had come down actually to playing with words. It worried him that he was not backed throughout by his friend Charles Fox, though he was a very staunch friend, trying hard to conduct an unconductable hero through the difficulties of life, where it seemed that everything continually went wrong.

The Prince had found the possibility of a likely priest to wed them, one against whom there could be found little to argue, save that for the moment he was in the Fleet Prison for debt! But then so were a great many more heroes, debt was hardly a crime. In fact, if the Prince had really thought about it, he must have realised that at various times in his career it was a surprise that he had not found himself there.

The clergyman's name was Mr. Burt, he owed £500, a mere pittance to the eager Prince, who paid his debt and set him free, then promised him a bishopric to boot, if only he would conduct a legal ceremony!

He required the service to be binding. He was madly in love. In truth he was not trying to rush it through, but to satisfy his personal reactions and the anxiety of the lady. He could see hope round the next corner. He regretted the stupid letter from Charles Fox, who should have known better than to upset him, and called the marriage a 'desperate step', which it was not. He had mentioned what would happen if there were children of this marriage. One must remember that such things *were* possible.

The Prince laid the letter aside.

"It does not worry you?" his love asked him, as they sat

over the parlour fire, with the first snowflakes of winter falling without.

"I know my own mind."

She laid her hand tenderly in his. "I will be a good wife, I will love you for ever," she promised him.

"I also," and he kissed her.

He believed that he had taken a tremendous step in the right direction.

Maria had returned to London with the smile of a young girl on her radiant face. She had lost years, she believed, she could laugh again, and she drove to her own darling little house which she had always regretted leaving behind her. It looked even lovelier than she had remembered it. The welcome of the Prince must have filled her with joy.

"I have missed you so much, my dearest," she would have said, and with truth, for the poor lady had been bitterly lonely.

"I know, I too. We put all that behind us now. We are taking hands for ever, and stepping forward into a bright new future," he said, and smoothed aside any doubts which she could for a moment have felt.

Later, deeply in love with him, she confessed. "I—I could not have gone on as I was doing," she whispered, "too frequently my pillow was soaked by my own tears."

"And mine," he vowed, then brightly. "No more of this. Indeed no more."

"The marriage is for ever," she said.

"Till eternity," he told her, and at that moment he probably meant it. He was a man who did not understand himself, behaving in the strangest manner, and contradicting himself all the time.

It was a joy to see her again, so young. He hoped she had not noticed that he had put on weight; he could never over-

come the call of the table, loved fattening foods, and wine with which to wash them down. He was annoyed with Fox for being so pompous, and so unenthusiastic about the marriage which was the only thing to do. He made a further step about the bishopric he had promised to the Rev. Burt, and making quite sure that the cheque was valid. Not all the Prince's financial arrangements had this necessary accessory to them.

He was married on December the 15th.

When the Prince was roused with hot chocolate, trimmed with a small alp of whipped cream atop it, on the day of his marriage, the valet bowed low, and wished him well.

The Prince sat up in bed, his nightcap awry and the tassel down on one side of him. He was eager as a schoolboy with an extra pound of sweets.

"I will make all my servants knights," he vowed, and the poor man believed that he could do this.

He had never been happier than he was at this gay hour. He had certainly been more faithful to this love than he had ever been to any other, and it was remarkable.

Maria herself was now bound to him, so she believed. This wedding day was the greatest of all her life. They would step out into a new world this gay Thursday when they wed with Christmas round the next corner, and somehow or other they had contrived to keep it a great secret.

She dressed at midday for the afternoon ceremony, and she had now gone very quiet. She was in her own pretty bedroom in Park Street, and with her the maidservant who had travelled with her through those months spent in France, and who possibly knew better than most how much the poor lady had suffered.

"You are trembling, Ma'am," the woman said.

"Perhaps I am 'shy," and she smiled whimsically, for she did indeed feel very shy.

"Some cognac, Ma'am? The day is icy cold, the roads bad, they tell me. And there is snow about. It *makes* you cold, and cognac would warm you."

She would have refused, Maria did not yield easily to drink, and disliked it. It worried her, but the woman who knew her perhaps better than she knew herself, insisted, and sent a footman to bring some to her.

She drank it when it came, and had to confess that at least it warmed her, for in spite of the heavy log fires everywhere, she was most horribly cold.

It was one of those days which never seem to dawn entirely, but stay dark with the promise of snow coming up, so that even the candles on her dressing-table had to be lit, and the fire stoked hard to make the room seem more pleasant.

The maid brought her the new dress.

"I am glad I chose a plain blue dress," the lady said, "for it is the Prince's favourite colour, so he tells me. It's simply made. That helps me."

It was the colour of harebells, and she had a matching ribbon attached to her very thick hair, tied into a huge bow at the side, the ends falling almost to the slim shoulder.

She wore no jewels, for somehow she felt these to be out of place. The Prince, eager to please her, had slipped down to Kew Palace, and there, when Mama's back was turned, had helped himself to a magnificent diamond brooch from her jewel case. It was to be his wedding gift to his wife, and worth a fortune. Unhappily, before he escaped from the palace, Mama's tiring woman found the brooch to be missing, and told the Queen. His mama made no light matter of such misdemeanours and she was furiously indignant. He had to return home to Carlton House without it.

"But I do not ask jewels. Our love is jewel enough," said the lady of his enchantment.

How sweet she was! he told himself.

"Our love is greater than jewels," Maria told him when ultimately he confessed, for he had that charming little-boy habit of confessing these errors, his face wrinkled with care, and his eyes dancing at the same time.

None knew that they were marrying, not even Mama, he said, but there he was wrong. Mama did not trust her difficult son a yard, and she always made it her job to discover what was going on. She had always thought that he would marry 'this woman' (this was the manner in which the Queen alluded to her), one could expect nothing else from him. Anyway the ceremony would not be legal. They *must* know this. Never for a moment did Her Majesty consider that it would have any binding status, and she thought that the love which her eldest son bestowed so freely was not binding either! Given a few years, there would be somebody else. And in the end, naturally he would come round to the rules and regulation by which a king held his throne; he would announce his betrothal to a lady of the blood royal, wed her, and live happily ever after. He would bestow annual sons on the State, as Mama had done. There had been nothing in the matter of hanging back from her royal duties about Mama, and although she hated bringing children into the world, she had kept on with the work.

She was, in her own way, a wise woman.

She knew that they were marrying, though nobody had told her, but at her age she could hear rumour in the wind, see it in Georgie's behaviour and the way he spoke to her. She was convinced that this was a distressing error of judgment.

The marriage was conducted quietly and quite impersonally, in Mrs. Fitzherbert's home. It is true that various friends who had been politely requested to come, were away and could not attend. Maria had produced two Roman Catholic witnesses, who ran the risk of running into trouble later on, but came

and stood by her. Her nannie and her uncle also witnessed the marriage.

Outside the house there was no sign of what was afoot, and how history was being made. Mr. Burt went through the ceremony, and the loving couple stood hand in hand before him, and perhaps, poor lady, she believed that nothing could part them again. If she did, how wrong she was! The Prince signed his name, and the two witnesses did the same, and then Mrs. Fitzherbert accepted the certificate of their legal (?) marriage to keep.

The Prince smirked.

He said, "This is for ever!"

For her, most certainly, it was all that.

Both of them must surely have known that what they had done was against the Royal Marriages Act, how could they have hoped to argue otherwise? The Act of Settlement, which they must have realised came into it, specified that no monarch married to a Roman Catholic could reign. George had no intention of giving up the crown. Nothing would have made him forgo the throne, even though he argued that the Act of Settlement was a nuisance, making people expect too much of him. 'Time will help me,' he believed.

George knew perfectly well that with this certificate, even if it was quite meaningless, he would find Maria in his arms for ever, for she would stay faithful, long long after he had forgotten . . . that the marriage had ever taken place.

"I love you, dearest," he said later when they prepared to go to Richmond for their honeymoon.

She did not have to tell him that she loved him, for she was unbelievably joyful. She believed that she had done the right thing, and now would live happily ever after.

The day was frosty now, the street crisply echoing with the sound of coach wheels, and the harsh footsteps of

passers-by, none of whom knew that within this quiet house, history had been made. As the evening darkened, there came the voices of the carollers on doorsteps, always a pleasant sound.

They took some refreshment together, and then before it got too dark, for the days were almost at their shortest, they set forth on the journey to Richmond. They had reached Isleworth, which was the countryside of course, before night overtook them, and here the carriage broke down, so that for a short time they were delayed. Not that a small misadventure made any difference to their own unbelievable happiness. It was their wedding day, and the sky was brilliant with more stars than they had ever seen before, as so frequently happens at Christmas time. The night was clear. It held rare promise for the future.

Owing to the passing mishap, they got to Richmond a trifle late, and the candles had been set alight in the windows to welcome them, and the curtains drawn back. Supper would be prepared and awaiting them, the fires stacked high, and crackling gaily in the grates, and here, with the night advanced, they could hear everywhere the amiable echo of the 'waits' singing their happy carols, singing in the era of Christmas, perhaps the loveliest time of all the year, into the world.

It was *the* romantic night for them.

Joyously as they entered hand in hand, the major-domo stepped forward to greet them, and all the menservants, and the capped women folk, stood around him, with clean caps and aprons, and curtsying low to greet them. They wished them well. This was the marriage each one had so hoped would come, for all of them loved the mistress of the house, and would have done anything for her.

They left their cloaks aside and went into the little dining-room to eat. It is possible that in this hour the Prince really

believed in himself, and thought that he was going to break down the walls of parental and parliamentary reserve, and she, as his wife, must ultimately be his Queen!

How wrong he was!

They dallied over the food, much of it, far more than men and women eat today, for those were the times of good and extravagant meals which could last for three to four hours. It was one of the wonder evenings of their whole lives, and later they went back to the parlour and sat there talking with the wine brought close. They had come through the dreadful hours of suspense and doubt, their pratings, their stolen meetings, the feeling that the world treated them as being naughty children, when in truth they were the royal lovers. They could hear children singing on Richmond Hill, the old Christmas hymns which are the sweetest of them all, and the church clock striking away the hours. They were alone together, and she wore his ring. She felt as though she had entered the Elysian fields. As though there had never been any ecstasy in the world so vivid and entrancing as this.

"I love you, my Maria," he said. He was more in love with her than he had been with any other woman in all the world. That was the truth. But even this affection which he bore, could never change him when it came to his varying habits, his flirtations, and those naughty ways which were all part of the Prince of Wales. She forgave him because she loved him, and always would. "I have prayed for this hour, my love and at times dreaded lest it would never come, but be for ever a dream. Now it is here!"

"I also have prayed for it," she told him.

He held her pretty little hands in his fat ones; even though he was still so young, he was far too stout, but then he ate wildly, and drank of the best. He was one of those men, and although there were times when he mourned his stoutness, and implored the doctors to help him, he could never

carry out any treatment for very long, and always reverted to the happiness which the gay board could offer him.

"You shall never regret this happy happy day, my sweet," he promised her, "and always this will be the sacred hour which we shall remember throughout our lives. Our honeymoon night! This is our secret, few others know what has happened to us today, and now we can face the world and laugh at it."

"We can," and she smiled.

They lived in the happy age when they could keep their privacy, and no evening newspapers could spatter their names all over sheets of newsprint, and tell the world what had happened. Their dream had become reality.

She felt slightly tearful sitting in his arms beside the fire. She would love him till she died, for she was the faithful kind. Perhaps even then she realised that there was a side of his nature which she did not understand, the side which had not her abundant and sensitive affection, the side which did not forgive as easily as she did.

But he loved her, for all that. He loved her as much as he had the power within him, and I should have said that she was the only woman whom he *truly* loved. This was not merely the big attraction of winning the girl whom at one time he had thought he could not get. He had told his friends 'I always feel safe with Maria.' His brothers confessed that the friendship between them was 'the best possible thing for Georgie, for Mrs. Fitz. *can* control him'. Perhaps not entirely, but without doubt she had tried her best to guide him through many of the difficulties into the brightness of a happy future.

She wished that she knew her parents-in-law, but the Queen would never accept her. She must be sensible about this. If the hour came that she went ahead and was herself a queen (and this was something that the girl dared not think of),

she might then have to meet her mother-in-law, but not until that hour, and she had an uneasy feeling that the moment was not yet here.

The clock struck midnight.

"It grows late," said the Prince, and rose from the sofa, the type that he liked best. He held out his hand to her. She took that hand and tenderly kissed it, then curtsied to him. They moved to the door, and it opened before them. Ahead was the ornate staircase, with the pretty balustrade which had been his Christmas gift to her last year. They went up the stairs.

The butler saw them go.

May they have children to bless them! he told himself, and bowed a wise, old head.

F I V E

THE NEWS sneaked out a little at a time. None could believe it was true. What had induced the Prince to marry the lady at last? they asked themselves, whatever could it have been? They were quite happy as they were, and she wasn't the only lady in the land who was the Prince's love. Some doubted lest this move brought them no nearer to the heart's desire, and were not so sure that she would come to the throne. There was that old tartar at Kew Palace to be considered, and *she* would be quick to take action against it, surely?

Maria did not move house for a while.

It was natural that she would have wished to share a home with her husband, but when people had the audacity to ask her about it, she said, "Not yet." Possibly she felt that if she took the necessary moves quietly, one after another, and with time between them to help, it would be wiser. She had no doubt but that her marriage was legal. Perhaps she had come to the stage when she believed too much of what her lover told her. Perhaps she was too deeply in love, for he was a fascinating man, and she knew he could compel this. But she would never have conformed to this marriage had she not thought that it was true.

People experienced some difficulty in not knowing what to call the lady, and after a time they referred to her as 'the Prince's wife'. She felt that could offend none, and it was the truth, therefore she accepted it.

They spent the honeymoon happily at Richmond, but by Christmas they returned to London, where of course there was a great deal of chatter about what had happened. It was obvious that the members of the family, the Prince's brothers, were prepared to accept her as a member of the family, too; they invited her out to dine with them, and came to feast with her.

Whereas with a secret marriage one might have thought that the people concerned in it were intending to keep it so, when it came to it, they made no effort to hide the fact that each was the other's. The Prince slept at 27 Park Street every night, and his carriage came round for him early next morning, and all the world and its wife could see it waiting to take the gay gentleman home again. He went with her to concerts and balls, and they were apparently living quite comfortably, and would be happy ever after. But they still had the two houses, and he lived in Carlton House, whilst she stayed in Park Street, otherwise they went everywhere together.

That was the happiest spring of both their lives, and then, of course, the usual tittle-tattle began. Was she with child? A son and heir might be here in due time, some said. Others that they knew the nurse she had engaged. Yet nobody knew anything for certain, and the two people most closely concerned in it all remained calm and quite indifferent to all the backchat.

In the hot summer which came in July of that year, when half the population had left London because they found it far too stuffy, the royal couple went down to Brighton, with the idea of economising.

They rented houses there, she a small house in a side street, he a farmhouse which had a view of the amiable sea, and which he rented from his rather peculiar cook named Weltje.

This man, Weltje, was a most extraordinary figure in the

land, one of those pantomime figures who, incidentally, amused his royal master enormously, and gave him a lot of fun. Weltje could lend him money when in need. Also he could fly into violent passions, refusing to cook for him, even at the moment when all the guests were assembled round the banqueting table. Yet he stayed the course, and remained with the Prince.

Whether Mrs. Fitzherbert liked him or not, none knew. Possibly not, but she was far too wise ever to say so.

For her part she was passionately in love, and she remained that way, even against the most cruel blows of fate, until her life's end. The Prince, for his part, was surprisingly improper! He adored shocking people. He loved making a fool of himself. The practical joke entertained him beyond belief, and he expected Maria to share this fun.

They were a strange pair of opposites; she religious, very much so, gentle, and never depraved; he always depraved, ready with a vulgar joke, and vastly amused by it. His charm for her is difficult to understand, save for his good looks, the moments when he could be sweet as honey, and tender with her, spoiling in the extreme, someone for whom she was deeply sorry, and whom she ached to help. Her love! Her heaven!

She had never been desperately in love before. The wonder of it transformed her. She had been the 'old man's darling', but this was a lover younger than herself, playfully agile, ready with voluptuous kisses which swung her off her feet, a darling and a devil in one.

They gave small parties. For the moment she had managed to keep some of his more vulgar friends at bay, but of course that would never last, though she does not appear to have known it. She loved the sparkling conversation which went round the table. The long sojourns at Brighton by the sea, a place which was now emanating from the little fishing village of her forebears into a royal 'place by the sea', with a new palace going up there. The Prince had magnificent plans for

the old farmstead, and was determined to make it a palace above all others.

Apparently she did not try to steady his expenditure. It would seem that she knew when to stop, or perhaps to put it more baldly, when her efforts would be futile. Time went on.

She grew to like some of his attractive friends—Sheridan, whom he loved, the Duke of Rutland, who spread the rumour that ‘gossip says that Mrs. Fitz. is with child’, a rumour bound to start, and whether it was true or not, nobody has ever found out. This report continually went the rounds, as could be expected. Scandal said that some time after her marriage ‘she had two children’, the first a little girl, Minney, was later adopted by Mrs. Fitzherbert, and brought up in her household. “My friend Lady Seymour’s child,” said Maria, but was this true? asked the gossips. The other child was said to be a son, of whom nothing more was heard.

There was never any public suggestion that she did have a child by the Prince, and if it happened (as it could have done), it must have been quietly kept in the background of things. At these times it was possible to do this. Emma Hamilton gave birth to her daughter when Nelson was actually giving a dinner party in the house, and she herself appeared within a couple of days, fresh as a daisy, and all was well. Mrs. Fitzherbert desired children because she loved them. If she had had a child, she would have found it very hard to part with it. And if Minney was her child, the Seymours passed it off as being theirs. Is this what happened? Was it for the good of the crown and all concerned?

She would have kept it a secret. But undoubtedly later when she was said to have adopted this little girl, both she and the Prince were devoted to her, and she gave every sign of being the baby’s mother.

Brighton was thrilling. When they were not in London,

this was where the Prince and his lady were. Now there was a sea front, bathing was the mode, and there had come into vogue the bathing women, whose duty it was to duck halting bathers; for ducking was urgent; nobody must enter the sea, in peril of their lives, unless they were immediately ducked. It was vital to get water over the head. Little shops had opened up; there was also horse-racing, which enchanted the Prince, who was of a sporting nature.

Mrs. Fitzherbert walked in the streets and was curtsied to as though she were the accepted Princess of Wales. She was always calmly dignified; she could remain calm when the Prince flew into one of his most unreasonable rages, and she stayed in love with him.

"I should have died without you," he told her.

"Now we shall die together," she promised him comfortingly.

He said, "I do not seek to be King, I should rather die as your love than wear a crown." Yet it is extremely unlikely that had he ever come to the moment when he had to choose between the two of them, George could have brought himself to turn his eyes from the dazzle of the crown.

"If we love each other, nothing else matters," she said.

The Prince went nowhere without her, 'it would make me *désolé*', he said, but for the time being he preferred to be at home with her, rather than entertain. They spent their time listening to music, which both enjoyed, sitting hand in hand, whilst the musicians played to them. Or devotedly talking. It would seem that they had come out of a bad patch into the light, and now were so completely happy that there was no world outside their two selves. He was rapturous, but how did she privately feel?

Much later she told a friend, 'I loved him so deeply that I did not pause to think. I just loved him.' But she was a woman of the world. She must have had moments when she

knew it could not last, when she realised that the calls of the state would take him from her. Or didn't she think?

"I'd crowns resign to call thee mine," he told her again, kissing her with affection. "You are my sweet lass of Richmond Hill."

He recalled the first hour when he had heard that song, on a visit to the Cremorne Gardens, and a tenor had risen to sing it. The Prince had been so delighted that he rose in his chair and shouted 'Bravo! Bravo!'

His family accepted her, save of course the King and Queen; she had expected that, but the royal dukes were amiable and very friendly with her. She *was* the most attractive woman. Her own particular friends were Lord Hugh and Lady Horatia Seymour, with their small children, and she doted on them.

"I love all babies," she confessed.

"If we had had children . . .?" he said, for he too loved them.

"It lies in the hands of God," she told him simply, and left it at that. "We have each other; to be in love and wedded, surely that is sufficient?"

"To have you, my own sweeting, is sufficient for me," he told her, and at this stage he meant it.

The Prince was now living as a married man, wedded to the woman of his dreams, though she had still not moved into his home. She kept on her house, he kept his. They had talked it over, quite prosaically, and whilst matters were as they were, it seemed to be the most suitable thing to do.

When the first honeymoon passion slightly waned, she must have found that some of this gay gentleman's habits were a bit peculiar.

He was a grown-up schoolboy really, amusing and quite ridiculous at times, enchantingly kind, easily captivated, but just

as ready with a pout. When he gave a grand dinner party to the officers of the local regiment, he would sneak out whilst they drank together, find their uniform gloves waiting in the hall for their departure, and fill them up with a quick-setting lemon jelly, chuckling to himself! When the evening's festivities ended, and the officers backed out in fine style to pick up coats and cloaks, caps and gloves, in the hall, they were unable to put the gloves on! The Prince was ravished at the sight of their dilemma, dancing at the sight like an elated small boy. But could his wife have been amused?

She was a quiet woman, she loved music and dancing, cherished her friends, and wanted to be loved, but possibly some of her husband's less romantic practical jokes must have worried her.

He gave wild parties, and after a late dinner (nobody dined before nine) he would take his friends down to the Lanes of Brighton, most of them singing noisily, some dancing in the narrow streets, and making a hullabaloo. So much so that windows shot up and rude voices told them to stop. To the working men and women who lived there and wanted a good night's rest to get the strength to go into tomorrow, it must have been infuriating. Blasphemy was everywhere. Loved by some, others loathed him, but the gay Prince could accept all this in good part.

If this shocked Maria, she did not say so. She believed that this was her duty, and like a good Catholic she adhered faithfully to her duty. She never quarrelled with him. Although he was her lover and her husband, she always reminded herself 'One day he will be my King,' and if he behaved as nothing more than a fat rather bucolic playboy, George the Fourth to-be always expected people to remember that one day he *would* come to the Stone of Scone.

Mrs. Fitzherbert stayed placid and in her own house, at no time did she share his. Perhaps she was right, for it was

important to be meticulous, but she must have wondered what would happen in the end. The mad King was ill, and growing madder. God will show me the way, she would have said.

They were deeply in love and so happy together, far happier than she was with her former old husbands, and even if he worried her at times the Prince was a magnificent lover and proficient at the art of conquest.

"I do not think of tomorrow whilst I live today," she told a friend, a very great friend.

"But surely ahead there could lie heartbreak?"

"If there does, then I will accept it when it comes. I am his wife."

"Morganatically, you know."

She must have quivered for a moment. "In the eyes of my God I am his wife, and will remain his wife," she said, and this she meant.

It was the era of the mistress, and most of the royal brothers indulged themselves in this manner. The Duke of York married when told to, but then carried on with his old lady friend, accepted by everyone, who amused herself with a marvellous sideline of her own. She sold army commissions to those prepared to pay, and did well out of it. The Duke of Clarence had lived with the actress, Mrs. Jordan, for years, and had ten children by her. The Duke of Kent spent his young life in the arms of Madame de St. Laurent, until things got into such a muddle that he had to marry Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, and fathered Queen Victoria. The Duke of Sussex copied big brother, and he actually married Lady Augusta Murray, and was sublimely happy with her. The mistress was the mode, though one doubts if Mrs. Fitzherbert ever thought of herself as being this. She was sure that she *was* his wife. Her church accepted the marriage, she had suffered no religious disadvantages through it, and would not do so. Probably on the day that she and the Prince started through the

night on their honeymoon in Richmond, she came to the conclusion that now her life had moved into calmer waters.

How wrong she was, poor lady!

She had married undoubtedly the most impossible man in Europe, and almost immediately his debts began to make themselves felt. For the time being, he had to close down Carlton House, and continue at Brighton, and all of a sudden he had taken the most enormous fancy to this maritime abode. He hushed it up a little, but there were nasty enquiries about it in Parliament, enquiries which Maria must have loathed.

"We *should* retrench," she said.

"Princes do not retrench," he told her, "the money is there, and it has to be found for me. I shall see to that."

She dared not try to retrench for him; she had already found that he was easily provoked if his dignity and royal birth were impugned, for he *was* the Prince of Wales, and he deserved everything that he could get. Possibly she prayed for happier times ahead, and waited. But by 1787 he was in trouble. He had bought what he called his 'farmhouse', and had improved it out of all understanding, with great hopes that in the future he would make it the most famous palace in all the world. The expenditure put him into serious debt. When he gave dinner parties in the superb new abode, with Mrs. Fitzherbert at the head of the table, the indignant tradesmen of Brighton assembled outside and booed him. It would have been passable if they had stayed at the booing, but they did not. Stones came through the windows, to attract attention to themselves, which they did. The Prince though irritated, does not seem to have been too much bothered.

"All of us have some difficulties," he told Maria.

"Would not Mr. Pitt help? Could they not be paid off on the so-much-a-month principle, which would make it easier for you?" she asked.

"They'll be paid off," he assured her haughtily.

But of course this did not happen quite as easily as he suggested, and by the April, Parliament got down to the very awkward matter of discussing the Prince's debts, his rather peculiar behaviour at times, and his future. This moment came just as Maria believed that the fuss about their marriage had cooled down. She knew they were in debt, but she possibly had the good sense to realise that debt would always be with them whilst the Prince was the sort of man he was.

Privately their marriage had gone well. The Prince had met her mother and was always extremely kind to her, for he *was* a kind man. Could it be that his marriage had calmed him down slightly, and that he was going to change his ways?

Immediately after their wedding, before the snow had gone, England had begun to chat. They said that Maria was pregnant. This, they announced, was why they had wed, the Prince being fond of children, and yet nothing seemed to happen to verify the claim. She did for a time excuse herself from parties much more than she had ever done before (she loved entertaining and being entertained); she said that she was 'not very well'. Naturally everybody put this down to the obvious reason, and sat back waiting for more exciting news. Is Mrs. Fitz. going to have a baby? What will the Prince do then? He was, as everybody knew, extremely good to children, but he would surely find a son of his own something of a problem, seeing that the marriage had been . . . 'Well, you know what I mean', they said. What would the King do, or was he too mad to do anything?

Those who knew the Prince sufficiently well—and dared—asked him if he had a son on the way.

"Maybe," he chuckled gaily, and flinging back his head roared with laughter. "Princes have to have sons, don't they?" he asked them.

Then, as nothing happened, the gossip died down, for other

things cropped up. The first thing that happened was that Mrs. Fitzherbert sold her home in Park Street and went to live nearer to her husband—if he were her husband. Everyone argued about this. Was he, or was he not?

In truth Maria had not been too anxious to lose that home, but the Prince had become insistent about it. "It was my husband's home, and he left it to me," she said.

"That era is over, and you have another husband now who desires that you live nearer to *his* home," yet he never suggested that she should share his actual house. I should have said that what he wished to do was to put her in a better position than most of his mistresses, but not actually as his wife. Save for the last hours of his life, when I do believe that he longed for her.

"I am happy in Park Street," she said.

"But that is over now, and we are married," and he kissed her. All the same, the sneaking off when dark came, to his love's abode, had always given him something of a thrill; perhaps he was the original little boy who never grew up. He lived as a schoolboy to his dying day.

"It would be improper for me to live in Carlton House," she said, vaguely apprehensive that he might suggest this. "The politicians are ever difficult, and complications would arise. I do not think I could bear that."

It gave the Prince the opportunity to suggest the house which all along he had had in view. It stood in Pall Mall. A new house was always gilt to his gingerbread, and he would decorate it as a fitting background to her charm and beauty, which of course he did, and made himself wildly unpopular as a result. For the people who were paying for all his fun, were the taxpayers, and they could not see how he was permitted to run them into such unbelievable debt as he did.

For the new house, I doubt if Maria ever felt quite the love that she had given to her original one. Women carry

memories with their homes, and hate parting with them, but I imagine that when it came to it, the poor lady had very little choice. Although she much admired her clever husband's passion for the glitter of crystal chandeliers, the glow of tapestries, and the eternal brilliance that he sought to associate with his background, she did not like it for herself.

She must have known that the seers had predicted a son for her this autumn. By then, she had gone down to Brighton, dancing and amusing herself, driving out with the Prince, who drove madly at times, and racing home from Chanctonbury Ring in time for breakfast. Breakfast was a vastly important time for pleasant entertaining, everybody gave breakfast parties.

"Where will this end?" asked the gossips, who got together in the small eating-houses where they drank delicious chocolate, foaming with cream, or in the Olde Shippe, to consort together with ratafias and port. Chatter went with it naturally, and the best chat of all was about this very strange Prince of Wales, and the woman whom he said that he had officially married.

There came no further news of Mrs. Fitzherbert's confinement, and perhaps an heir to the throne. Or would the King and Queen not permit that? What would happen if they did have a son? Never had the Olde Shippe talked more!

"I must not get ill," she said, and laughed over it. "If I do, the gossips will give me twins!" She forgave, for she was this sort of amiable and friendly woman.

She went without ceremony in and out of the Prince's house, living a calm and unruffled life.

It is true that during that autumn she did go home to stay with her mother for a time, and a babe could have been born then; if it had, it is quite certain that nobody knew of it. She also went away to visit her brothers-in-law, the Dukes of York and Clarence, but that would not have served the same purpose.

She was too prudent and too well-informed to be foolish, and would never have dragged the royal family into a scene which would take its place in the history books.

To her husband she said gaily, "They give me a babe for every month I have been wed!"

"Women will talk! Women talk for ever."

"But not always correctly, my love."

"Never correctly, that is because they are women," and he kissed her fervently. He was completely happy with her.

His mother hoped that for a time dear Georgie had settled down, but this was the last thing dear Georgie ever did, or was ever likely to do. He believed in the fairy story and the happy ending. He had sufficient of his papa in him to believe that somehow or other the happy ending *would* come to him, and that they would live happily ever after.

"I am in love, my dearest," he said to her yet again.

"I also, and my love is until death."

"I shall love you even after that. We eat, drink and are merry now, and will live happily for ever after."

Whether he really thought this or not, none will ever know. Today was his mecca, what mattered tomorrow? He was a strange fellow for convincing himself with his own lies.

"We said 'till death us do part'," she reminded him, and it had meant that for her. What it had meant to the Prince could have been quite another story.

The first eighteen months of marriage were happy because it so happened that the country had slipped into quieter waters. The abominable hubbub of last year, and the row that had disturbed everyone when the mad King had lost the American colonies, was now over. George the Third seems never to have challenged his difficult son about his marriage. He knew, of course, that they were living together, Mama would have forced that home, telling him what he ought to do, and when he ought to do it. He did not pay much attention.

However, this happy period passed over their heads as it was almost bound to do, given time. The Prince seemed surprised to find that once more he was in financial trouble. Her behaviour was calm. In those days a woman knew nothing of her husband's financial affairs, and did not ask. If others suggested that they spent too much, Mrs. Fitzherbert would have said that it was his affair and nothing to do with her, though privately it did distress her.

His advisers had persuaded him to close down Carlton House *pro tem*, for it had become an enormous expense to him. This would curtail his outlay, of course, and he seized upon it as a good excuse for spending a great deal more on his 'farmhouse' at Brighton.

"We retrench in London, which means we have more for other places," he told Maria.

"Would it not be wise to pay the bills first?"

"I am never wise!" he told her and kissed her.

But Brighton was not as easy as it had been. On his first arrival there, he had been greeted as a long lost brother by the tradespeople, all seeking to get his custom. He would deal with any who would give him good credit! All Brighton had the notice on their shops that they worked under royal patronage, and it was quite peculiar if you had not got one.

When it came to sending in their bills, things had not gone quite so well. The Prince never complied with his side of the bargain. Nor did he intend to change his methods.

Now, whenever they entertained, crowds collected to throw mud at the guests, some of whom vehemently complained about this. Once he made the mistaken gesture of appearing in person on the balcony, to assure them that everything was quite all right. The matter had been momentarily overlooked, he said, but in the morning he would instruct his steward to pay every penny. It would most certainly come to them. This well-intentioned method of appeasement met with disaster. It

happened in the midst of a party, he in a pale rose satin coat, embossed with pearls and silver beads on the lapels in a delicious pattern of flowers. A good shot from one determined man in the crowd got him full in the face with a handful of manure! His return into the house where the guests were dining, must have been singularly ignominious!

But, perhaps unhappily, George Prince of Wales could survive the most sordid scenes, which did not upset him more than a trifle. How did Maria feel about it, sitting there and never showing by the flicker of an eyelid how she did feel?

"This is a passing thing," he told her. "Parliament ought to stop it. It is their duty, not mine. Charles Fox should help me."

He leant on Charles Fox, who was honest and a great supporter, but the irritating part behind him was that Fox could not see why the palace at Brighton need be quite so radiant, and so magnificent. They could take its perfecting a little more slowly, and not try to do everything at once. But the Prince was a gaily impetuous man, and he pouted.

"Now or never!" said he, "we live but a short time, we ought to make the most of it."

He had developed a liking for minarets.

"Not very English," his friend Fox told him.

"But I like them."

If Maria was concerned about it all, and she must have been, for she loved him dearly, she dared say nothing. For the first time she realised that the barrenness of the Prince's purse could very easily in the end bring him under Mama's heel again. That alarmed her. She could not trust this designing Queen who had refused to meet her. She could not readily understand all that was happening.

"My dear, we should always be sure that we have the money before we spend it," she once ventured to tell him.

That was not his argument. "Men know more about money than women do," he reminded her. "The purse is their business, not women's. A good girl takes what is given her, and does not complain."

He was so kind, so sweet. Perhaps he could do no wrong in her eyes, for she believed in him, though why, makes one wonder. He was dazzlingly good-looking, of course, so fair-haired and blue-eyed. So amusing, and with such an infectious smile. She felt a deep love for him, far deeper than anything she had felt for her two previous husbands, both of whom had been much too old for her. It was an enchanting change to be married to a man younger than herself.

"Don't worry! My friend, Fox, will see this silly trouble through," said the Prince, with that profound optimism which possessed him when he got into muddles. "We shall settle old Pitt yet. I never did like that man, and he never did like me."

He smirked engagingly.

It was spring again, April, a lovely time of the year, and in Brighton the sea was so blue and the Downs so warmly sweet, that she was very happy. How exquisite had been the mauve and snow-white crocuses under the trees! How fragrant were the branches now, with their swelling buds! And any moment the leaves would break for another glorious summer. Wild cherry was in the hedges, and the pink-tipped apple blossom glowed in people's gardens.

Maria had set aside the financial matters, which she believed to be her husband's business, not hers. That was usual and right, and he became irritated when she made foolish suggestions, foolish because she did not know the whole conditions. Had she done, she would have been horrified.

The day had come when once again the matter of the Prince's debts was brought before the House.

"This is the hour of our freedom from that chain which

throttles us," said the Prince, "and by this evening everything will be settled."

"I pray so," she said over her morning chocolate.

"But of course! This is what the House of Parliament is for, to come to the help of distressed princes!" and he laughed. "We must not worry for a moment. This is the new day, and it is going to be *our* day." He sipped his hot chocolate with the young mountain of whipped cream on top of it, and he told her that it did the heart good.

S I X

SOME CYNIC once wrote *Whereas love makes marriages, money wrecks them*, and how true it is!

Sheridan brought the difficult question before the full House. He stated that something must be done about the final settlement of the Prince of Wales' debts. For the moment, and he indicated a pile of papers, he had £30,000 worth of them lying here before him. The idea was to clear these once and for all, and set the Prince free from the unpleasant onus of them, but with the strict warning that no further sums of money would be given to pay for his extravagances.

After this was finally settled, then he would be given a full allowance of £100,000 a year, and told that if he mismanaged this and got into further trouble, no more would be allotted to him; he was firm about this. No arguments; no debts; and pleas sent (usually via his mama) to ease the creditors' alarms and make things easier for the misguided Prince, would go unheeded. Mr. Pitt was worried. He had never cared for the silly extravagances of this most reckless young man, and said that the country should demand a close scrutiny of his finances, to see how such wild expenditure could have come about. Naturally if this came out, it would be most alarming, as everybody knew.

The situation *was* alarming already.

I imagine that Maria knew very little of what was going

on, because she would have been kept out of it. Ladies did not hear of gentlemen's misdemeanours, and financial matters were only for the males. Also, she trusted her lover completely; maybe foolishly, but this was the mode. How she could have continued to trust him at this stage of her marriage, for time was moving on, one cannot imagine. She must have seen such a lot of his gay miscalculations, and rushing into the most incomprehensible debts. He would forfeit all sorts of virtues to enjoy himself in pleasantries which, however she excused them, were most certainly on the fringe of vices.

Was she so deeply in love that she could not withhold her emotional reaction to him, her desire for him, and her longing to comfort and to please him? Was she herself so devout and so much in love with him, that she refused to believe that he could cheat anyone in this difficult world? This is possibly nearer to the truth.

If she had been challenged (and she was not), she would have said with courage, 'I love him. He has sworn to love me until death us do part. I abide by everything that I have vowed, and shall never doubt him.'

It is also just possible that this was the time when the lady was *enceinte*. She had wanted this. She loved him so much that she craved to bear his son, but she must have been alarmed for when this happened; it would undoubtedly demand quite a lot of stage management, and would complicate life considerably.

Did she have a baby then?

The truth of this is open to conjecture, but later in her life, after Maria had died, Minney Seymour herself did most certainly hint that she *was* the Regent's daughter. She could have been.

"Poor George is going through a difficult time," said Queen Maria, as occasionally he called her in fun.

"He will get out of it," her friend said.

"It makes him very unhappy, and it worries me for him," she told them, but I doubt if it worried the Prince overmuch. His great worry would have been if Parliament turned nasty, and he could not get hold of what he considered to be his right.

He had to get money. He had had long talks with Charles Fox, who had promised to help him in every way he could, but it must come immediately. This made it far more tricky to manage.

It is certain that Mr. Fox was one of the best friends the Prince had ever had, and that he had always thought this peculiar marriage was slightly bogus. He did not believe in it. I do not think that it had been planned with the idea of cheating, but I believe that escape holes had been accepted, on the principle that they might come in useful. How this woman believed in it has always amazed me, save that I feel sure that she would have had the backing of her own priest; she would not have engaged in it without this. But now the argument was coming far more into the open than either of them wanted.

They waited impatiently for news from Westminster, knowing full well that now, for the first time, their marriage would have to be mentioned in Parliament.

"Dear one, we have nothing to fear," she told him, her arms about him. "I should never have been here with you were I not legally wedded to you. That would indeed have been mortal sin."

"I know." Mortal sin had never worried him too much!

"We did no wrong," and she held his hand. "God would not let us be hurt, you know."

He was not so sure, and said so. "There will be tremendous argument, Maria."

"But that is the duty of Parliament, they have to argue," and she smiled, but at heart, though she concealed it, she must

have been terribly anxious about it all. She would never have thought that he could desert her, for their love was too deep for that, but she might have been aware of the fact that it could become *her* duty to desert *him*.

In Westminster there was one of those heated debates which rise from the very heart. If it transpired to the general public that the future King of England had unofficially, but legally, married a Roman Catholic of the faith, then undoubtedly he would be forced to forfeit his right to the throne, and stand back for the Duke of York. The idea did not fascinate the Duke of York, who had his own troubles without any other interference. George's argument that he had plenty of brothers to succeed him, was not wholly true, for most of them were in exactly the same mess as he was, and Sussex was the only one who had married, morganatically of course, but he *had* stuck out for a wedding ring. The others lived casually and gaily with mistresses, a horde of babies, and some financial commitments which undoubtedly they would have been delighted to see pushed aside.

The argument which Charles Fox wished to adopt was that this marriage of the Prince of Wales had never been legal. The Prince had always described it as being a 'proper marriage', though when one went closer into the matter it was difficult to discover how he had ever arrived at this idea. The clergyman had been brought from the Fleet prison, and later given a bishopric to make him amenable, should any alarming questions be asked. One would have thought that the Catholic side would have taken some part in it, but they had apparently done nothing. The clergyman—Mr. Burt—had indeed been ordained at some time, but had something of a nebulous career behind him. At the hour of the wedding Charles Fox had written to him and had actually stated that it was 'a mock marriage, for it can be no other, and it is not honourable . . .' This was true.

One understands the Prince's happy-go-lucky attitude towards it, but it is surprising that Mrs. Fitzherbert could honestly believe the marriage to be genuine. Nowhere in any of the letters, the books on the matter, can one find any real reference to the fact that she had 'procured Catholic reassurance', yet at the same time I am sure that, being the woman she obviously was, she must have been positive that the marriage which he contemplated making, would make her position secure. Otherwise she would never have gone through with it. She would have been far too deeply affected by the thought of going against her church, even if it made her Queen Maria to-be, to have done this.

The debate in Parliament was terrific.

On April the thirtieth it all began again, and some considerable help was asked for with which to pay the Prince's just debts. When the actual sum was disclosed, it was so large that members of Parliament were staggered by it.

The Prince was now much more worried than he had been at any other time in his life. He left Maria to mourn alone, she had her women friends, he would have said, as though this could cover it, and he went up to Carlton House. Now the once so splendid mansion which had cost the nation heaven alone knows what, was wrapped in dust sheets, and in places the mould had begun its work. It was no residence for a future king, but he was determined to be there. He could not believe that life was turning out to be so difficult.

At no cost must dear Maria be dragged into this. He had in the end despatched her to stay with a friend of his, the Hon. Mrs. Fitzgerald, and it was there that the very disheartened Prince brought her the news of what had taken place. He was deeply shocked by everything. He did not know how to tell her, or what he could do about it, and turned it over and over in his mind, as he was driven to meet her.

In this dilemma (no new one for the ambitious Prince) he

usually solved the difficulty in the easiest manner. The only way to help himself out of such an obnoxious affair, was to jest about it, and take it all as being one of those jokes which made him laugh at it.

He went into Mrs. Fitzgerald's parlour and met his love there. It was a virtuous-looking parlour, the type that he liked least, for he adhered to marble, porcelain and silken hangings. Maria was very pale.

"What has happened?" she asked, much more anxious about it than she had ever been.

"You cannot imagine what happened in the House yesterday, my dear," he said and tittered.

The poor lady was white and anguished. She was not the sort of person to be silent as to the worry, or to underestimate what it could do to her, and she said so.

"It is entirely Fox's fault," snapped the Prince, his method of getting himself out of an awkward situation, and incriminating a friend.

"Would it not be best if you told me?" and she must have been sheet-white with anxiety. "Would it not be wise to hold nothing back? Nothing?"

"He actually stood up in the House and denied that you and I are man and wife! Can you imagine such a thing?" and seeing how white she had gone, he tried to giggle and pass it off as a joke.

She looked at him, her eyes dark with worry, those vividly blue eyes that he loved so well; he tried to tell her that this had happened behind his back, it was not his fault, or his responsibility. She loosened his hands from her arms.

"I can have nothing more to do with you," she said, but not angrily, for she seldom lost her temper, but she had gone quiet, as though with pain. It must have been at that time that he began to break.

He was petulant. "It is not my fault. I know differently.

I never told him to say such wicked things, but to deny them . . . You are my wife, in the eyes of both God and man, and this is for ever." He said it imperiously.

"I need not be that," she said quietly. "I shall go on alone. Here there is no room for me. There is nothing," and turning she left him.

Now he was in real trouble.

He paced about the small parlour, something which he always did when concerned, then sent for a friend of his, a Mr. Grey, begging him to explain to him what the conditions actually were. Charles Grey was a Whig, a young one, who the Prince had always thought was on his side. He said that undoubtedly Mr. Fox should never have said such a thing, and would not have done it, unless he was backed by the Prince's authority. The Prince should command his presence here immediately.

The Prince had never cared for rows.

He avoided them whenever he could, and he avoided this one, for after a long gap of cogitation with himself, Sheridan was the man for whom he sent.

The trouble was that poor Mrs. Fitzherbert was the person who was really suffering badly. She had now decided that whatever was said she must sever all her connections with H.R.H., and their love marriage must end. She would never see him again, and she wrote and said so, with such insistence that the agonised Prince could only be quite sure that this was true.

There were some discrepancies between the two stories. The one was told by Charles Fox, the other was the rambling ambiguous tale which the Prince himself was perpetuating. Much had been stated which was entirely untrue. She had every right to be angry now, and she *was* angry, but it was not her poor husband's fault, he said, and to refuse to see him because she was irritated was most unfair.

In the end she did meet him.

The story which the Prince put over must have been scarcely a truthful one, for when in a corner he never stuck to the truth. She was agonised, remorseful and terribly unhappy. She believed that she would be a social outcast and she had done no wrong; none would ever speak to her again, for she had been accused of being the Prince's mistress, never his wife.

The curious thing was that Mrs. Fitzherbert was never 'cut', after the fashion of the times when this took place, if someone had erred socially.

She was swarmed with visitors to her house, letters of condolence, and condemnation of the stupidity of a Parliament which had treated her so utterly disgracefully. Her uncle Henry Errington came valiantly into the row. He had been present when the wedding took place in Park Street, and was one of the witnesses. When the feud was at its height he met Charles Fox on the steps of Brooks' Club, and stopped him.

He said, "I understand that you have denied the Prince's marriage to Mrs. Fitzherbert? That is untrue, for it did take place and you have been entirely misinformed. I happen to have been present at the ceremony."

There could have been a duel!

The thought of it must have entered Fox's head, so that he was sick with fury. As a friend of the Prince, he had done his very best to save the heir to the throne from a most embarrassing situation; he had gallantly defended him with the sole idea of getting his colossal debts paid off. Then this had happened. Had he misunderstood the situation? He felt bitterly injured, for in truth he had had no idea that there had been witnesses at the marriage ceremony. The Prince had spoken of it in the airy-fairy way of a gentleman who manages to be unscrupulous but always does it in a pleasant manner. Now it seemed that both Jack Smythe and Henry Errington had

signed as witnesses; the service had been entirely orthodox, nothing could be said against it, and it held.

Maria did nothing.

Was her heart broken? I feel that she suffered desperately, but whatsoever happened she still adored him, and believed in him. One thing is quite certain, she was sure that her marriage was legal in the eyes of the church, and later on the Pope himself backed her in this. The feelings of her church were what mattered most to this woman. In her eyes he was her husband, and whatever was said against them, or whatever could be decreed, she would remain for ever as his wife.

It was most remarkable that at this stage in the problem of her marriage, and everything that it involved, public sympathy was entirely with her, and understanding was closer than ever before. As she walked down the Lanes in Brighton, people still curtsied to her as to a Princess; men took off their hats. The friends who now visited her, were abundant in their sympathy and understanding. If she had ever had doubts, now she could be sure that she had loyal friends, and that her virtue was supreme.

Whatever else happened she was established. She would stay his wife for ever, loving him dauntlessly, till death parted them. She was calm and serene, but under it all she suffered deeply.

Was it true that at this time they rounded the most difficult corner of their lives, and was he really aware of how desperately he had hurt her? Possibly not. He had a charming way of stepping over difficulties, and smiling at the world. By the end of May he was back at the races, with her by his side. There was, of course, one unfortunate fracas, when rounding a corner unexpectedly he came face to face with Charles Fox.

Fox hesitated, then bowing low he said, "I always thought that your father was the greatest liar in Europe, but now I see that you are," and walked away.

For a moment the Prince paled, then he got out of it as he always did, by maintaining that that was not what Fox had meant. He was always a trifle hidebound in his jests.

By the time that the Epsom races began the Prince and his wife were there, and keenly interested in the stakes; they attended the special dances which were given in honour of the London season, she dancing a great deal, always in magnificent dresses and jewels.

Poor thing! She wanted so desperately to be happy, and although she had no desire to be the Queen of England, she deeply longed to be his devoted wife. The world had been kind in accepting her, but some of them had been ready to chat about her, when it went wrong. She had hated the disturbance about her in Parliament, and her connection with his debts.

"I will never speak to Charles Fox again," she told the Prince.

He tried to defend the man who had gallantly attempted to be a good friend to him. "He is not too bad really. This is the sort of thing which happens with people in Parliament," and he laughed.

"What he did to me was unutterably cruel."

"At the same time he could be instrumental in making you a Duchess, my sweet, and let us admit that being a Duchess is something worth while."

She turned on him for the first, perhaps the only, time in her life, and she had gone cold with severe apprehension, though she knew that she spoke the truth. "I'm not prepared to be made a Duchess by the man who has treated me so badly," she told him, "I shall do only what I believe to be prudent and best."

She never referred to it again. The commotion died down, as with all to-do's it passed and was done with.

Now, on official occasions, Maria discreetly accompanied her husband wherever he went. In July they returned to

Brighton, and by now he had said in the House that he was ashamed of his debts, and as far as he was concerned Carlton House could go into ruin, for he would not spend money to save it. Of course he never admitted that now all his attention was riveted on the glorious Pavilion he would make at Brighton. He'd show the world!

Maria never encouraged him in spending, but she must have felt the futility of trying to stop him. She wanted his happiness, and beautiful homes did make him happy, but she did no more. The first quarrel of their lives had come and gone, they were still together. Meanwhile, for a time, Charles Fox wisely went abroad.

There had been much in what he said and felt. Maria and George were not properly married officially, whatever had happened, and he had surely done his best. The Prince's debts were all paid off, but as Fox knew, that would only be an incentive for the extravagant Prince to start on the old routine all over again.

This was when the King became seriously ill. He had been worsening all the time, but what happened now was a sudden collapse. News came down to Brighton from Kew Palace, the Prince must leave for London immediately; he went alone.

"I—I don't know if he will live," he told Maria when they parted.

"Do they say that he is dying?"

"The message was vague, not telling anything that I most want to know," and then, "I fear that I have been a big trial to him. We live in strange times, Maria, my darling," and he kissed her farewell.

She had the power to cheer him, even when he felt that he had arrived at his last hour. It was not that he was sentimental about losing his father, they had never loved each other, but now he thought of the big chance the crown could bring to his life, and how would it affect Maria? She *was* his

wife in his own eyes, no matter what the world thought.

"I pray that he is not dead before I get there," he said of his father.

"No need for that. It may not be as bad as you think it is," she consoled him kindly.

Suddenly at this moment he felt a violent pang as he drove away from her; he turned again and went back. He did not know what impelled him, he was one of those strange men who respond vigorously to sudden thoughts, and he went to her, putting both arms about her, and kissing her long and compellingly.

"I love you, dear lady of my heart," he said, and his voice was thick with emotion.

She stared at him with those vividly blue eyes of hers. It had been her eyes which had first drawn him to her, hungry for her love, passionately fascinated by all that she could give him.

"I love you, George," she said, very tenderly, and very sweetly. It was his promise for the future and for ever, for, whatever he did to her, she would never cease to adore him. He was the one man for her.

Perhaps she would never know how tremendously she did love him, or to what limits she would go to prove this love. She sought his happiness and content, and knew him so well that most of all she sought to protect him from himself. Now she watched him go, her eyes sad, and after the door had finally shut, and the sound of his footsteps crossing the hall had died out echoing through her heart, she turned away, and hid her face in her hands. 'I love him so much,' she told herself, and suddenly, as though this terrible thought had only just occurred to her, 'whatever should I do if he turned from me and went back to *them*?'

One would have said that King George the Third had, on

the whole, been a most unattractive man. He was sour at times, and had the bad temper which frequently attends madness. An earnestly determined man, he had been absolutely faithful to the ugly German Princess whom he had married. He had cared for his country, always doing what he had thought to be right for it, and most faithfully he and his wife had produced a pack of sons to follow him later.

He had of course been mentally disturbed for years, though none would have admitted this. Subject to fits of violent and tumultuous temper, in which he flayed himself, and worked his body to a standstill, this time he had broken down completely. Perhaps he had had too many serious worries, and one could have said quite fairly that the behaviour of his eldest son was one of those things which had added to it. They had never understood each other, and never would.

Gone were the days when he could beat young George, and curtail his pocket money. Now he had to keep his hands off him and flay him with words, knowing perfectly well that his son paid no attention to anything that he said.

Now, quite suddenly, he collapsed. He was walking in the gardens of Kew Palace at the time, and had come to a lone fir tree, which he knew as Henry Baker, a trusted friend of his, because all the trees were his friends, or so he said. He told them that Henry Baker had betrayed him, and later was found collapsed at the base of the tree.

His doctors believed that death was near, and it would have been the best possible thing in the world if he *had* died here and now. But unhappily life does not work this way.

They carried him into the palace, silent as a corpse. They hovered over him day and night, and he still breathed. Then they came to the terrible conclusion that he would live. His mind had completely gone, and there was no hope for his future, but he could and he would live on.

This was the moment when Charles Fox came back to Eng-

land and it was obvious that ultimately a Regent must be appointed. When George, Prince of Wales, had come to Kew he had hoped that it would be to his father's deathbed; it was nothing of the kind. He could not return to Maria as quickly as he had expected. Somehow he had felt when he had turned and rushed back for another kiss, that this was something different, something changing his whole outlook, something which would take him far, as though he turned down a new road. But this was not to be yet.

The moment it is possible, I will
come to you, he wrote to her.

Eventually, in 1812, it was not his friend Charles Fox who appointed the Prince as Regent, but Mr. Rolle, and he made the conditions, one of them being that the Prince was *not* married to Mrs. Fitzherbert. A new clause was put into the Regency Bill, which annulled the Prince's powers if he ceased to live here in this country, or married a Catholic.

Poor lady! Patiently awaiting his return to Brighton, she had no idea that the kiss he had returned to give her, was the great goodbye to everything that had been. She waited still believing in him, still loving, as she would be until the day she died.

Pro tem it seemed that there might be yet another of those dreadful parliamentary discussions. Was there no end to them? Had not this poor lady suffered sufficiently? Facts had been hard enough, rumours were harder.

In the end it was the Attorney-General who rose and assured members that rumours were not grounds on which to legislate, and this ended the debate.

By now, the delay and the silence of her husband (possibly because he did not know what to say to convince her that all was well), must have made her utterly wretched. But what-

ever happened she still loved him and remained eternally faithful. In her own eyes she was ever his wife.

It was now quite certain that George the Third, a mere shadow of himself, would physically recover. He had gone grey-white, even his skin was grey, and because it was unsafe for him to shave or be shaved, for he could do such extraordinary things, he looked like a grey ghost of his real self. Maria admired the noble way in which the Queen stood by him, apparently never noticing that there was anything different about him, apparently still attached to him.

When George returned to her after a long time of argument, of dissension, and some dismay, she knew that he too had changed. He had taken to drink. He had always been inclined this way, turning to the cup when too depressed, and he had the most desperate fits of depression to lay him low.

"You are not the same," she said suddenly over their first quiet supper together in her house, with all his favourite foods, and herself in the blue dress which he preferred for her.

"I am exactly the same," he snapped, for he was on edge, and he called to the butler for more drink.

When he had received it, and the butler had left them as was ever their rule, they were alone in the room together, and she turned gently to him.

"George, you drink too much. You have never had that amount in the one evening."

"I have great responsibilities, and I am tired out. What do you expect me to do?"

"Your first responsibility is to keep strong and healthy, to be a good Regent for your people," she said quietly, and this was what she believed.

"At least I am the one to give the commands," he said, and this was the first time in his life that he had turned on her. She must have been alarmingly surprised, even if she disclosed nothing, for he had never done this to her before. She was by

nature a calm woman, for ever resigned to the fate which she believed steered her through this life. If she was horrified, she would never have revealed it, and probably this annoyed him even more.

It was at this time that mercifully there were many outside influences to help her. She was deeply anxious about the French Revolution, and full of her own longing to help. She accepted into her own house at Brighon bands of them seeking help and good advice. Whilst the Regent returned to his practical jokes in the Lanes, getting himself cordially disliked for his pains, Mrs. Fitzherbert did everything she could to help those who had escaped the guillotine, and came penniless to this country.

She frequently dined at the Pavilion when he entertained cavalry officers, and in the course of the meal she must have seen him drinking hard, slurring his words, and becoming difficult. They would go romping out to the Lanes for fun, and if when he returned she was not there, then he would search the house with a drawn sword, as he would hunt a thief, making a great noise, calling out 'Hi, Robber!' at every step he took.

Maria remained calm.

But with his father already mad, and in the doctors' hands, surely there must have been those frantic moments when she doubted his sanity, and trembled lest he also could go the same way.

Maria was devoted to her quiet home the seaside of the Old Steine, with the square before it, the crocuses blooming there in spring, and the new leaves showing on slender trees.

"What does she feel about all this?" the gossips asked each other.

"Does she ever mention the Prince?"

"Will she ever be Queen of England, or could she ever have had a child?" and then quietly, in whispers, "You know,

at one time there was talk . . . ! A little girl, so they said . . . She went home to have it, but they did say . . .”

She did what any honourable wife would do, just nothing at all, because there was nothing that a lady could do in these circumstances. She stayed loyal, discreetly quiet, and wept only in private. She must have fretted terribly for she was wounded so bitterly, but she refused to show this pain to others.

A little girl . . . said the crowd.

This gossip had come early in her marriage. Rumours insisted that she had had two children, and that both of them were born in her mother's house. A daughter the first time (and her name was Minney), a delicate son the next. The story of the son seems to have faded out with time, but the story of her daughter kept on cropping up all through the rest of her life. The rumour was that she had gone home for her confinements, though there is no historic proof of this.

They managed this sort of situation strangely well in those times, and took what were believed to be outrageous risks, for although no gentlewoman was ever supposed to have a baby without staying in bed for at least a month afterwards, people in desperation did risk doing without this.

Emma Hamilton had managed to bear Lord Nelson's daughter and be out and about again in a few days (almost immediately, it seems, but this was probably to give the lie to her secret.) I know that she was of far different breeding from Mrs. Fitzherbert, and was a much stronger woman than Maria had ever been. Though a vivacious and amusing woman, socially strenuous, Maria had never had sublime good health, but I would not query the truth of the scandal because of that. I think that Minney *was* her child.

This rumour was the sort of thing that got around at times about every famous lady, and undoubtedly it would have persisted, but one has to recall, whatever else one feels about it,

that at this time the small girl who was called Minney came more into Maria's life, apparently as her great friend's child.

Her best friends had always been the Seymours, a famous Protestant family; Lord Hugh had married Lady Horatia, Maria's great friend, and just about now it was urgent for Her Ladyship to go off to Madeira for her health. Seeing how very uncomfortable sea travel was in those days (I should have thought perfectly appalling), it is most strange how many society ladies did go abroad, and actually said that they enjoyed it.

Lady Horatia had seven children, which was nothing unusual for a lady in her position then, and she was distressed that she could not take all of them with her.

Mrs. Fitzherbert had always been very fond of children and loved them, and she suggested that *pro tem* she should take the baby into her own house, she would love to have her there; she cared for her, and so they agreed to this. Nothing much was said of it, and apparently there was no reason why Lady Horatia should not have left the child with a dear friend, though odd when the Seymours were vehement leaders in the Protestant church, formidably so, and Maria *was* a Catholic. Nothing was said, however, and out of the blue a very small girl appeared in Maria's home in Brighton, and shared its comforts.

The Prince was enchanted by her. Now he never visited Maria without a pocketful of comfits, or some small sweeties, and the baby soon got to know him and appreciate him, and, as babies do, showed it to him. She called him Prinny.

"I love babies," he said.

He always had done so. Maria was completely happy about it. If she knew that the gossips were all talking, and she must have done so, she would not have changed her mood, for somehow she felt that gossip was outside it.

For now she lived quietly in the background of his life,

but she knew that he needed her, relied on her kind help, her wise advice, and the fact that she always stayed *firm* about facts.

"I will never leave you," she promised him.

"How could a wife ever leave her husband?" and he smiled.

"Some wives do," she admitted, and rather sadly, "I know that I shall always be your background, here to help you when I am needed, and that is what every wife should be."

"I love you," he told her again and again, "I do love you more than life itself."

"You *are* my life," she whispered, and her eyes were wet with the tears of love.

It was at Brighton, and through the open windows they could hear the murmur of the sea against the shingle on the beach. Out of the distance came the sound of stringed instruments, of violin and mandolin, and the gentle but moaning 'cello. Somewhere there was dancing, by the sound of footsteps slurring against a polished floor, and the night was advanced.

"If a man has a good wife, then he has heaven itself," said the enraptured Prince as he laid his arms about her.

"You have ever been heaven to me," she answered, and this was true.

Both her former husbands had been men so much older than herself. She thought suddenly of how she could not walk as slowly as they did, or think as slowly. She thought of how she had loved youth, even though now she was not very young herself. She adored children, young animals, spring with the lambs in the meadows by Rottingdean, children paddling on the beach, and screaming with joy over the feel of the water. She felt all those things that somehow or other she believed were part of this new marriage with a young man.

Once she had reproached herself that he was six years her junior, and that this was wrong. The age difference should be

on the husband's side. She told him of it now. He turned towards her again, his light blue eyes dancing with joy.

"I am your young husband, darling, and for ever you will be my young wife," then quickly, "I will never let you suffer for me. I will always be fair and just to you. You shall be the guiding star in my life, and I pray that I shall be the guiding star in yours."

There came the laughter of people below, young lovers, they knew, for it was that careless lovely laughter which comes when a girl is not sure, and the man demanding. Both of them recognised it.

"Love compels the world," said the Prince. "It was love for each other that brought us together, how terrible it would be if we lost each other! How hideous if we had never met."

She lay there in his arms. He is my love, she must have thought, and whatever else the world thinks or says about it, I shall love him till I die.

She would never betray him, never be cold to him, and always forgive the way he behaved, and even with her he could behave most atrociously when the mood took him. She did stay faithful for ever, loving him as she had said, until she died, forgiving everything, and putting him first in her life when the hour came that he was King as well as husband.

But was he ever her true husband? It seems dubious.

S E V E N

WITH THE King's health worsening, the Prince came nearer to the throne and this encouraged his extravagance. He had his eye now on the money bags which were attached to the throne itself, and could see no reason why he should have to retrench when so much was there, and sooner rather than later would come to him. In the first careless rapture of coming closer to the Stone of Scone, he bought gaily. People trusted him, believing that soon he *must* be King, and then be able to pay any bill sent in to him.

"If they cannot trust me, then whom in the name of fortune can they trust?" he asked his courtiers.

They reassured him.

He ran rebelliously into the face of disaster, and nobody could have been more surprised than he was when that disaster caught up with him.

Life was following the usual pattern as it had always done, and probably Mrs. Fitzherbert saw no reason why it should not continue this way for ever.

"I shall love him till I die," she continued to maintain, and she abided by this.

If she had ever thought that her first marriages to two considerably older men had been real marriages, how wrong she had been, and she now knew that with a younger love at her side she was so much happier. They would never part.

At this stage she did not think that parting was even possible. His brothers and sisters loved her and asked her to their houses, all of them were loyal friends, even if the Queen did withhold her approval and still refused to acknowledge her, but then she had always been a very hard woman. The King was, of course, too mad to make any move in any direction.

I love him, and that is what matters, she told herself.

He was such an attractive man, with that pink and white face, like first almond blossom in spring, and the bland blue eyes which had so much laughter in them. His hair was pretty; fair and curly, something which any woman would envy. He was amusing in his conversation, and gay with the infectious gaiety of youth. If he had not been so amusing, he would have been the greatest bore in history, but somehow or other she never realised this.

At this period, just before he began to run to seed, he was not gross, which he became later. It was the breathing space before he took more heavily to drink and was perpetually in a drunken stupor, saying it was the only way to forget all the nasty things that had happened to him. Then, he did not try to stay his ways, and whereas in the earlier days when of course he did tittle, and did behave outrageously, it was more the behaviour of a schoolboy who seeks to taste the cup of life, then pulls a face when he finds that it tastes unpleasant.

He was surprisingly attractive, far more so than any book can make him. Eternally young and gay; never excusing his naughtiness, but being droll about the sins he committed, always to pass it all off.

As yet that girlish pink and white skin had not become too florid, and he still had that infectious laugh which she had loved, and which is the most attractive thing for anyone to have. He could be so diverting, one laughed until one felt ill! And the sulks had not yet appeared, as they did after-

wards. They increased when the time arrived when he took more wine, and was surrounded by that engulfing sea of debts. Even then Mrs. Fitzherbert stayed faithful, though there must have been moments when she was sadly stricken in the realisation that here was the man whom she loved, but try as she would could *not* reform.

Possibly the alliance was made all the worse for her because she was the young woman who never ran into debt herself, and found it utterly odious. To her it was a form of theft, taking from another with the promise of repayment, and never intending to do anything about it. She may have still believed that given time and all her love she could reform him; but this she could never have done, though she could not see it.

She sometimes argued about money.

"Let us pay every week as we go along, and then we shall never owe a penny, and be all the better for it," was what she suggested to him.

"Like that, we should be for ever paying," and he laughed; "if we are always with our fingers in the money bags, there will be no time to enjoy what we have bought. No time for the happiness of love," he explained.

"But it is right to be honest. One has to bear in mind that a debt is ever a debt."

He merely laughed again.

"I have too many debts to pay off, too much to do. One day, as King, I shall have the earth." And then with a sigh, "My father gets no better. Whenever I meet him I ask myself, 'Does he know me?' and stand uncertain, hoping that by some small sign he does."

"Poor man!" said Maria, and her eyes were wet.

"A tiresome man."

"Still, your father," and she added, "even when they are difficult to understand, and hard to manage, you have to remember that it is still your duty to love your parents."

"Some are better than others," was what he said.

She wished that he was not so changeable, at moments so earnest and good to her, and she longing to be with him, and at others she was disturbed by his behaviour. Of course she knew that in a way it irritated him that his father held on to such a hopeless life. Today he was a ghost-man, George said so. A mockery of what he had once been.

She said, "It disturbs me that those who attend him could turn so harsh with him. I know how difficult such people can be, and how hard it is to be kind and forbearing with them. I hate the fact that they have sticks with which they hit him. I feel it possible that they *might* bully him."

George sulked slightly. "I have told you that he used to bully me, and nobody was sorry about that!" He voice had the timbre of annoyance in it.

"Poor man, he is sick, and cannot help himself. One should be patient and strive to help him."

"And if they do that—" now the Prince was defiant, though not for the world would she have admitted this—"he will not live for ever."

Sometimes his varying moods agitated her, troubling her far more than she would have cared to confess. She knew that his mother had tried to make him promise to marry a German princess. He had come down to Maria after a visit to Kew, and was in a state of feverish indignation. He was not entirely sober, to her grief, for these days quite frequently he returned from visits to Kew having had to take more than something to comfort himself. He was furious at the suggestion of a German princess, had said that he would never think of such a thing, and had flown into a passion. There were times when he and his mama quarrelled most fiercely.

It was at this time that Maria took a furnished house for the summer, away from Brighton. It was in fact back in Richmond, which she had always loved, perhaps because

it reminded her of that delightful honeymoon which she and the Prince had spent there, one Christmas time.

This house was called Marble Hill, a charming house which belonged to Lady Suffolk, a mutual friend. Maria had the sudden feeling that maybe it would be better for both of them if she got away, and she loved the grounds, the limpid pool with the trees around it, and the most beautiful view which could be seen from the terraces.

The Prince also loved Marble Hill, and said that he felt that it could be a good idea for her. He was travelling about a great deal just now, because he was needed more frequently in London whilst his father's condition was rapidly becoming more and more distressing.

"Marble Hill is not a house, it is a fairy tale," he said the first time he visited it.

"A fairy tale in which they married and lived happily ever after," she suggested.

"All fairy tales end this way, but life when you have to live it is not as easy as it sounds to be," and he confessed this with a sigh.

She got the feeling now that a cloud hung over her, that life could not continue this way for very long. It was as if a ghost walked with her, and whispered it as a secret in her ear. Once it dismayed her and she wept to such an extent that the Prince asked what was the matter.

When she could control her distress, she admitted that she felt that this could not continue. That they were coming to its end, and that she could not live without him.

"But, sweet one, do you imagine that I could live without you?" he asked her.

"I know . . . I know . . . I am very foolish, for I get so easily disturbed."

"It shows how much you care. You love me, even more than I think," and he smiled.

"More than life itself," she said, "more than stars and moon and sun."

He was deeply touched by it.

One day she arranged to dine that night with the Duke of Clarence who lived not too far away. She was fond of him, of all her brothers-in-law in fact, and dined and supped with them, and they with her, quite frequently.

On this morning there came a letter for her from Brighton brought by a special messenger and written to her by the Prince. She touched it uneasily, poor girl, for at this time she knew that he was carrying on a flirtation with Lady Jersey, the chatter about it had come to her home, to be instantly crushed.

He wrote that he had to come to London to visit Kew Palace this day and would come on to his brother's house this night; he said would she tell them? and he begged her to excuse his haste.

Maria fingered the letter once or twice, and did not know why she did this, save that it made her feel afraid. The letter was entirely usual, he spent a lot of time using his pen, and wrote gaily, loving doing this. She should not have been disturbed by a perfectly normal letter, but she was. She should have thought no more about it, but somehow it haunted her all through that day.

She dressed for the dinner party and arrived actually at the moment when she knew her host would expect her. He told her that the Prince was coming for certain, after he had finished with Mama at Kew Palace.

He'll be tired out, she told herself.

When she arrived the Prince was not yet there, which was not unusual, for Mama was a great gossip and he could easily have found it hard to extricate himself. Yet now Maria felt apprehensive, as if the woman within her had turned to stone. She did not know why quite suddenly she was so dismayed

when there was little for her to be dismayed about. She had actually taken her place at the exquisitely prepared dinner table, when the Prince's letter was brought to her by a butler.

It was her dismissal.

'Prinny' was one of those extraordinary men who change on the single instant, for his morning letter had betrayed no single hint of this. Now he wrote cruelly, from Kew Palace, obviously he was in a great hurry, and he wrote tersely as he always did in an emergency, saying that he never expected to see her again. The affair was over and dead. She must put him out of her life for eternity, as he now put her out of his.

She sat there, a woman turned to ice, with the chat of others going on around her and becoming like the noise of a distant sea in her ears. There was a throbbing doubt in her heart, a doubt which told her that she must be dreaming this, for anything so shocking could not be true. Prinny would never do it. The other side of her nature warned her, as others had often done, that when it came to the end of the love story, he would do it brusquely and with grim determination. He would find another love to take her place and tell her coldly to forget him.

This was exactly what he had done.

The love story had finished, but not with the words 'and they lived happily ever after', for she could never be happy again. Suddenly she spoke in a voice which she did not recognise as being her own.

"I must go home," she said.

She gripped the table to steady herself, and she had gone sheet-white, her light blue eyes suddenly darkened by her pain. Immediately everyone there realised that something quite dreadful must have happened to her, and silence came.

The Duke of Clarence must have had some idea of what his brother had said, for he knew that George had been having

one of his crazy love affairs with Lady Jersey, who detested Mrs. Fitzherbert and had boasted that one of these days she would get rid of her for ever. Had she succeeded? She was much younger than Maria, of course, and radiantly pretty, with a sharp tongue, a thing that Maria had never had.

He said, "I will accompany you home, Maria."

She shook her head. She said that she would rather ride alone, and when he thought about it he knew that she had always faced her terrible troubles entirely alone, rather than with a trusted friend.

Nobody can imagine what suffering she must have gone through while driving back home. The letter had been her final dismissal. It was cruel that George had the power to hurt her more than anyone else in the country, and, listening to the clopping of the horse hoofs, she felt that this would kill her. The financial side did not distress her, for she was sure that he would give her an allowance, and see that she was properly provided for, but what were these compared with the one provision that she sought most of all—his love?

She drove home to Richmond, and went straight to her room, telling the butler if anyone enquired to say that she was ill. She put it down to the sick headache. She stayed in that room for several days, and during that time no communication reached her from the Prince, no note, no flowers, nothing.

Later on, of course, when probably he had had a row with Lady Jersey, who had a vile temper, and they were constantly quarrelling with unbelievable violence, he did write to her, and try to straighten out things. She ignored the letters.

This was the attitude which Prinny had ever found to be encouraging; he wrote saying that he had no idea what had come over him, but now he knew that parting with her would kill him, and, unless she wrote to him, he would die. He rushed into the usual trail of silly excuses, threatening death, mortal wounds, throwing down the crown to his next brother,

and bolting to the Continent for ever. Once he started, he was one of those men who could not stop the eternal babble about his woes. When he was foolish, this Prince was the most foolish man in all the world, and she must have seen it to the full. But Maria still loved him. She was a woman who gave her whole self to love, and nothing would change her, this was the tragic part of it. She could not escape the fact that he meant everything to her and always would.

The agony when she had opened his letter had upset her. She realised—must have done—that he had the power to make her utterly wretched, and could do this quite casually. The love she felt for him was never the emotion that he felt for her.

She had known of his stupid flirtation with Lady Jersey, of course; 'Georgie loves flirting, it gives him immense gratification to pay compliments which mean nothing. It is unfortunately so upsetting for the poor women to whom he pays them.' Perhaps at the time she did not appreciate the fact that she was one of them.

He was horrified. What had he done? Flowers came to her house, trinkets of the type that she loved best. She was backed by her own people and Lord Hugh Seymour. The next thing that the Prince did followed his usual routine when flouted. He was ill. Did she when she heard this, remember the marriage which had come from that night when he had inflicted a wound on himself, saying that if he could not live with her, then he would die for her?

This time she did nothing.

Maria did not write to him, she ignored his letters, his trinkets and his fond messages, but she must have been broken-hearted. He had dismissed her as he would have done a common servant. The letter of that morning had been gaily charming, ending with I-love-you, which seemed to be part of his routine with her. The letter which she had received when she

took her place at the Duke of Clarence's table that same night, had been rudely autocratic. Its message was *Go Away*.

She forgave him, for she must have known how weak was his intellect. Had he a single seed of his father's madness somewhere in him? Something which had not developed as it had done in Papa? Once, when someone had challenged him with this, he was reported to have replied, with one of his most amusing smiles, "But I have had no son to drive me mad! As my mama would tell you," and he had laughed.

How amusing he could be! How light of heart and how gay! What a rapturous lover with his arms about her and his mouth seeking her kisses! I shall love him till I die, she told herself quietly.

Being so brave, she adapted herself to her new surroundings, in a life without him. She did not change her methods or routine, because she felt this would be a mistake. There must be no 'outward and visible sign' that she had lost something which she had always felt to be the 'inward and spiritual grace' in his love for her.

She walked out at the same hour daily, always with a maid attending her, and in the street people curtsied to her as they drew level, for everyone of them accepted her as being the Princess of Wales, a thing she would never have claimed to be. She smiled sweetly. She gave alms to beggars, she attended mass with others at her church, just up the hill. If the days were long and irked her horribly, and if she wept at night when none could see, she admitted nothing.

I believe that was when her heart broke. For although some of her life returned, and there were moments ahead when she could have been happier again, it was plain that the cut of a sword had struck her.

Now summer had passed mid-June, and was moving into August, and she, recovering slightly, suddenly learnt of a new move which must have horrified her. It was that King George

the Third had in a same moment written to Mr. Pitt telling him that the connection between his eldest son and Mrs. Maria Fitzherbert had now ended. He added that the country was expecting the King to make the announcement of the Prince's engagement to the Queen's niece, the Princess Caroline of Brunswick.

She read the news calmly.

Perhaps she had the feeling that she had gone numb with despair. They had hurried matters, of course, but time was marching on. It was only natural that the country should seek heirs of another generation, only right and proper that it should have them, and she appreciated this. She was the most forgiving woman.

She continued her own life, back in Brighton, quite as usual, though on the day when the engagement was made public she did not go outside her home. On the face of things she was happy. She had many friends around her, and did not betray that the grief in her heart could at times hurt her so much. She attended tea parties, she could often be seen drinking her morning chocolate in the Olde Shippe, or shopping in the Lanes, being kind to children. But the country chattered about the new alliance, and hated it.

"Now he's going to marry a German princess, a niece of that sour old Queen."

"But he can't marry! We all know that he married dear Mrs. Fitzherbert, and she is his wife."

"He says he didn't marry her, only in the way which suited him, and she trusted him. He chose the way which could set him free but kept her bound, damn him!" And a fisherman picked up a sack of crabs quivering from the water, and walked off with them all stinking of brine.

"We don't want no more of them blasted Germans on this 'ere throne," said the old woman who told fortunes.

"Germans aren't no good. Neither are them Frenchies.

What we want is our own royal family. We want 'em to be English."

"But this will be another German Queen."

Poor Mrs. Fitzherbert must have heard the tail end of all this talk, only too keenly aware that the country would blame Prinny, a thing she had never done.

She knew that if his mama was at the back of it, and she was at the back of most things, it would have to be one of her relations, for she was very pro-German.

When she came to think about it, Maria could see that there were not too many brides to choose from. The choice had actually lain between Louise of Mecklenburg, a highly educated, and very beautiful young girl, and the tactless hoyden, the hail-fellow-well-met girl, Caroline of Brunswick, who had been selected.

But why? she asked herself, for *his* sake, why?

George had never been mad about very young girls, she felt, he liked mature womanhood, sophisticated and calm, yet they had chosen this uneducated and entirely unsophisticated Princess.

At first she could not believe that it was true. Then she saw the hard work of Mama, ever energetic when it concerned her own people, behind it all. She knew also, alas, that the powers that lived in the Prince were too weak to fight the family in a war on their own hearthrug. They had the capacity to give him more money, which he needed eternally, of course, or an advance through Parliament, if it came to it, or even, if things became terrible, to rob him of his crown and give it to one of his brothers!

The old days of his youth had returned, Maria could see it. He was back to being a small boy again, well and truly slapped by Mama if things went wrong, and the final choice had rested with her, and not with him.

And still, with all this talk going on, Maria kept to her daily

walk, knowing that, as she passed, some people named her and began to chat. Knowing that the world still talked about her as the woman who had no right to widowhood, and she suffered intolerably.

She wept for him.

Caroline was not the right wife for a man like Prinny. He was very particular about his person. He was the advocate of the bath, which some said was dangerous, and undermined the health (had not Rome died through bathing too much?) The Prince loved beauty, and had an artistic streak within him, which could so easily be distressed by embarrassing details. A colour which was a shade adrift in tone, could send him gibbering with dismay. He hated bad manners. He adored amusing talk, quips, jokes, the sort of jest which came so easily to him, and evoked an inspired reply.

The reports on the new Princess now dedicated to England were not inspiring, and Maria heard much from his brothers who constantly visited her, and had never failed to give her pride of place in their hearts.

"Poor Georgie! This was Mama at her worst. He will never put up with this new girl. She has spots!"

This was in itself sufficient, as Maria knew.

Or again, "She is blowsy, they tell me, not well educated, and so casual about her appearance one wonders why she ever bothers to dress at all! She hates cleanliness. They say that she never bathes."

And from the Duke of Clarence, "Some do insist that she is not mentally fit. Still plays with her dolls. Absurd, is it not? I would have said that she is one of those mentally affected children who have never grown up."

The talk must have horrified Maria, but at least it prepared her for the time ahead. Surely, she told herself, they cannot force him into this? But deep down in her heart she knew that the old Queen could do anything and would win. She had the

power, for as she laid down the law she wagged a full purse towards him, knowing that he was eternally in debt. Mama knew the way to silence George, and to make him do what she required of him.

The general chatter about the new Princess was most unkind; she was hideous, they said.

None could have been more worried than poor Maria, for she knew that Mama would force him into this if she wanted it. But she was herself the woman who could not lift a finger to save him. Love him as she always had done, she could not help him out of this chaotic marriage which would surely shatter his sanity? For she knew how much he suffered at times. Solitude was her companion, and at this dangerous time not the best one. She dared not meet people, for they talked too much. It was not that she could not talk, there was so much that she wanted to say, yet could not find words for it. It would be hopeless if she failed to restrain her tears, and could only make matters considerably worse. Her idea was to stay coolly unemotional (at least outwardly), though it was a situation which was gradually crucifying her.

One thing she knew for certain, and this was that she could take no action, for there was simply nothing that she could do to help in this wretched situation. If she interfered it could only worsen matters; besides, what right had she?

The Prince was royal. Therefore he was unapproachable. She distrusted his mother, and was ashamed of herself for doing this. Her role was silence, yet somehow she guessed that there must be moments when the Prince longed for her, and wept for her, and even prayed for her. At heart he was an earnestly religious man. Few people knew him as he really was, she thought, but she flattered herself that *she* did.

Poor man, she murmured, he is taking the action which cannot make him happy, and there is nothing that I can do about it.

"What is she like?" she asked, praying that she would be beautiful, of the lively nature which always amused him so much, and a good companion.

His brother was gloomy. "She is a niece of Mama's," he said.

"And is she like the Queen in nature?"

"Who knows?" and Sussex shrugged his shoulders. "She has been carefully brought up, I believe, but the family had little money and she is unused to royal equipment and such."

"But good?"

"She is not a Catholic, if that is what you mean."

"But naturally she could not be that."

Then he became more confidential. He said that reports had it that she was a clumsy girl, not pretty, and not particularly attracted by the beautiful things which did so much interest the Prince. She disliked pretty clothes, report had it that very often she did not bother to undress for a week on end, and was prone to leave washing out of her routine unless pressed to do it.

"But surely this is unthinkable . . . for George?" said the dismayed Maria. For he was so particular about details. He loved comforting baths, and fresh linen. She had once known him dismiss a valet because there was a single crease in a newly starched cravat. He was not the man to accept such things easily, and how he would dislike a woman who was not attentive to the details of her toilet, washed inadequately, and seldom sent for fresh linen!

"It is Mama." Sussex sat back with despair in his eyes; he got on very well with his eldest brother, and was fond of him; the thought of his marriage being a failure shocked him. "Mama says he must wed, perhaps there she is correct, but I would have thought that Caroline was the wrong woman. They say she is one of those people who have never grown up,

a *backfisch* still, although she is past the mid-twenties. She, of course, will be enchanted."

"But how can they be happy?" Maria turned to the window looking out on to the sea, cold with November, grey and misty. She felt that this landscape was much like her own life, and now she was desperately worried. Above all things she desired this man's happiness. "Why did he agree?" she asked.

Sussex again shrugged his shoulders, and looked at her with genuine pity in his eyes.

"Mama is getting the financial side put right. He is for ever in this distress, and the moment matters are put straight, it just starts again! Georgie can't help himself, he does this. Mama is the only person who can manage him. He will marry anyone to get rid of his debts. It is that, or standing down for Frederick. He would never do that."

"It might be wiser?"

The royal Duke looked at her and nodded. He thought that this would be the wisest arrangement of them all. George had been a shocking Prince of Wales, surely the most lively England had ever had, and definitely the most ill-advised, and extravagantly foolish. Frederick would be the better King, but when it came to crowns, he doubted if his elder brother would stand back.

"It would help him," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"Tell him so?" Sussex begged her.

She shook her head. "I am the last one to speak of it, I have walked out of his life. No, that is not true. I suppose he has dismissed me. Perhaps he was right, and I am not the proper influence. I think the best thing I can do for him is to stay as I am, out in the darkness," her voice broke a little with sadness, "and alone."

After a moment her brother-in-law—she always thought of him as this—spoke again.

"I doubt if my influence would have any power over him. Georgie hates being advised unless it is to do the thing that he already wants to do. I see ahead of us disaster, for this girl is most unsuitable. She is not his type, has few interests that he could share, and why Mama has chosen her none of us can think."

"It is in God's hands," Maria said. She had sufficient faith to leave it there and believe that she would be supported.

She lived life quietly in Brighton, never breaking any of her rules. She dutifully attended her church, and she prayed, heaven only knows how she must have prayed, for the man who had turned her away from him.

There was nothing more that she could do. Her interference could only worsen the whole situation; besides, she was no longer the woman who walked beside him, his bride, for he had cast her away. She thought of him all this time, but the tragedy is that it is doubtful if the erring Prince ever even gave her a second thought.

What do I do next? Maria asked herself, although she knew that unless she risked disturbing her Prince most terribly, there was actually nothing that she could do. She was tied fast, a prisoner of her own romance. She felt that now the door was locked behind her. A prison door. Had she done wrong in believing in the marriage which her church had honoured, but which the world would not admit?

No, she told herself.

She had said nothing when with November the announcement came, and she knew that all the world and its wife would be chattering about it. It was a shade more difficult to walk to the shops, with her maid a pace behind her; to talk in her usual friendly way with the shopkeepers, asking after their wives and children, and to go to church on Sunday. The eyes of the world were upon her; she was the woman who had

thought of herself as being his wife, perhaps his widow, perhaps the woman he never married at all, save in her own eyes, and in the eyes of God. She would never wed another, of course, she would walk alone to death and greet it when it came. For in her own eyes she was *not* his widow.

She was his wife, as she had vowed before God to be, and this would last for as long as they lived, and in eternity she saw herself again as being his wife for ever.

‘If he forsakes me, I am still eternally his, God help me,’ she prayed, for she loved him with all her heart.

In the November, a wretchedly depressing month at its best, and particularly bad this year, the Prince had asked officially for the hand in marriage of the Princess Caroline of Brunswick. The news was received with some amusement in the inns, the chocolate drinking houses, and the places where ladies and gentlemen met to chat.

“What do you think Maria says? This is the end of the romance. Anyway it lasted longer than most of us anticipated. I’ll say that.”

“If the child Minney had been a boy, he would never have done it, for of course Minney *is* his child.”

“Yes, of course. Oh, la la,” and a lady twirled her fan and fanned herself and winked over it.

“What will the Fitzherbert do now?”

A young girl standing by and listening said, “I am sorry for her. She was good to him, and I am sure that he was extremely trying.”

“But a king to-be, and women will do everything for a king to-be,” said the older woman.

“They do say he has been cooling off Mrs. Fitz. for quite a time. Oh well, she’s had a good run.”

Possibly for a brief while the poor lady thought of retiring to a convent, then somehow she turned from that. ‘He still

might want me, and I must be here if he does,' she told herself, for she was the woman who loved truly.

Fate moved fast.

A diplomat had been sent to Brunswick to the Princess, in the shape of the Earl of Malmesbury, and his work was to instruct the Princess in the rules and regulations of the English court, and how to conduct herself in her new role as the Princess of Wales.

When he met the lady, he must have been a little horrified, and could only think that Mama at Kew Palace had never seen her, nor did she know how shockingly badly the girl could behave.

She was ill-educated, and had spent her life in Germany, knowing little beyond the court of Hanover. She was amiable, the earl had to admit this, but riotous, of a kindly nature and always forgiving, but headstrong and romping. She was a tomboy who would fit in ill with the English court. She disliked washing, and her hair was brushed only when it looked like a beehive in which the bees had swarmed. She laughed noisily, and belched frequently. He could not see her as the Princess of Wales (even less as the Queen of England), but the decision lay in other hands. He had come to prepare her for her new country.

"I am not a fortunate man," he told others.

E I G H T

NOBODY CAN imagine what poor Maria suffered during this most grievous time, a period when she was wretchedly unhappy, and the whole of the English news centred round the new Princess whom the Prince would marry. Now she had rid herself of the house which she had bought in Pall Mall to take the place of the one her second husband had left her in Park Street, for she never wished to see it again. She had no letter from George, she wrote him none. She gathered that his affair with Lady Jersey still continued, though rumour had it that there were moments when the lady became virulent and he showed displeasure of her moods. Now his engagement had been announced.

Caroline was his mother's choice, of course. In Brunswick she was being 'instructed in court behaviour' by Lord Malmesbury, and she would leave Brunswick late in December to come to her new country.

She was married by proxy first, this was the rule of the times, and a second marriage would take place after she landed in England. How did George feel about it? None knew, and the lady of his mother's choice landed here in England with little pomp. Already the people recognised her as being Mama's idea, not the Prince's.

In Brighton Maria was ill. Kind doctors prescribed for her, but the real nature of her malady was a breaking heart,

and the whole world knows that once this happens there can be no cure. She was considerably thinner, and for a while could not eat, and was drenched with potions, as they felt she should be. She made no attempt to approach the Prince about the affair for she felt that the Queen's eye was on her. and would see that she never approached him. Nor did she wish to add to the desperate strain of his position.

The old Queen had won the day.

She had ruined the life of her eldest son, and of poor Maria, but incidentally she had also ruined the happiness of the rather childish robust Princess, who would come here to be Queen in succession to herself.

Caroline set sail for England with Lord Malmesbury still instructing her. He was finding that the job took all his time. She for her part was gay and lively in the extreme. She had never thought that she would wed. Impetuous, she was a hoyden, if one could call a princess this. She had a habit of making the most distasteful jests; her lack of personal cleanliness was disgraceful, and when reproved she said that she 'preferred her clothes to be dirty, for then she felt more at home in them.'

She was not even good-looking, thought Lord Malmesbury, and the Prince had always been particularly choosy about this quality in his women.

The legal marriage would take place as soon as possible after she arrived in London, and although Mrs. Fitzherbert did not know it, the Prince was having constant arguments with the family over their plans for his future.

"My brothers can have sons, I have loads of brothers," said he in a fury.

Mama insisted that it was the duty of any Prince of Wales to provide this very necessary asset to his inheritance.

"I would prefer to forgo the Stone of Scone," he replied, and made a rude gesture, which his mama did not understand.

He felt that to be a pity, for now he was in the mood which sought to shock her well and truly, but she could be extraordinarily severe, cold and aloof.

He was suffering qualms about the affair, and was anxious, not for his bride, so much as for himself. If he could have seen Maria for just a few moments and gain some confidence and help from her, then he felt sure that he could have got out of it. But he did have the good sense to make sure that Maria's allowance would continue whatever happened. This idea had originally been his brother's, not his own, but he boasted of his generosity and stressed his own virtue in the matter.

Impulsive in everything, he was finding that some of those friends whom he had thought to be the most staunch, were behaving unkindly to him. They felt that his behaviour towards Maria (who had never put a foot wrong) was without any decency at all. They were cold about his actions, respectful, but there it ended.

In the December of 1794, the Princess set sail for England. She was a large woman, not pretty, and still not particular about washing. She was always light-hearted, and had a piquante imagination, delighted with the idea that she would be a queen. She was now twenty-seven, and looked every minute of it, for she took no trouble at all about herself, or how she dressed. She also was inclined to lay down the law under the mistaken impression that she was being clever, and this was the last thing that she had ever been.

Before they got to her journey's end, one of the equerries took her aside, and told her that the Prince liked smart ladies; she *must* look smarter.

"But I have the beautiful dress," she said, a trifle scandalised.

"You can buy better in England," said he, "and it is not the dress. It is that which goes into the dress."

She pouted at that! "I am big, I know," she admitted, "but they tell me that the Prince is fat?"

"But the Prince is clean," said the equerry, with a stern tone to his voice.

She looked dismayed; almost as though she could not understand what it was that he said. He spoke also to her ladies, who agreed that the Princess considered washing to be a waste of time. In point of fact she had no more than a single change of clothes with her, for she had not considered more to be necessary. She was told that they were.

But the ladies promised to have a talk with the Princess, and eventually when they got to England she was properly washed and brushed, which made it easier to present her to the royal household. She had heard of Mrs. Fitzherbert, so it seemed, for she asked an equerry about her, saying that she had been told that the lady had great charm, was very pretty, and no wonder the Prince loved her.

"I meet her? *Ja*?" she asked.

"I imagine not, your Royal Highness," he replied with infinite care.

Meanwhile, a wretched Prince of Wales awaited her. By this time she had been met by those who had been appointed to bring her to the Palace of St. James. That day he asked one of them, a forerunner, what the lady was like.

"How does she look?" he asked.

"She is not very pretty, Sir," he said truthfully.

"I have heard this, but they do tell me that she is gay in her manner."

"She is gay, but it is hardly the sort of amusement which one fosters at court. She is clumsy, Sir. She had had no training in the language of the court, or of high society. She will improve."

It did not seem to be inspiring, but what could the poor man say? "But she can laugh?"

"Oh yes, Sir, and she is right merry with it."

The hour of meeting her, already wedded to her, was now approaching, and the Prince was unhappy. He had sought to drown his memories, but today he had tried to stay sober. He might stagger very slightly as he walked, and mumble as he spoke, but at the same time he knew that he excused himself of any blame. I could not have met her otherwise, he told himself and oh, how bitterly he thought of Maria, his love, his real wife, the only woman he had ever truly loved! And at this very moment he was telling himself this.

There was no doubt about it that when his first meeting came with his bride, it was an intense surprise to the Prince of Wales. None had dared tell him that she was quite as dreadful as she was. Lord Malmesbury, who had brought her this long journey, and had at times been shocked by her, and had even wept sad tears over her, now begged to be excused. He had done his job, and he went home. One might not like the Prince, as he said, but one could only be sorry for him in this most ghastly situation.

They dined that night. The Prince, trying to steady himself with repeated brandies, got gaily excited. Already the news of her behaviour had travelled into the city, down the narrow back alleys, the beer gardens and chocolate drinking houses. She made coarse jokes, they said, and they did not know if this was caused by her own coarse mind or her faulty English. She was most unsuitable, for whatever else the Prince had been, he had always been fastidious in his choice of mistresses, and should have been more so when it came to a wife.

"But he did not have nothing to do with it, did he?" asked a coster in a back street. "That was his ma."

"The old Queen was never no good," which was unfair, for she had worked hard for the country.

"He's got himself into a fine mess this time!"

"Serve him right!" and they laughed.

All the while somewhere quietly aloof Maria Fitzherbert waited, and she did not know what the message would be, or how she would answer it. So far she had not replied to the Prince's pleas, for with her marriage turned aside as being false, what else could she do? She did not thank him for his flowers, or convey to him any message of any kind. She must still stay silent, but deep down in her heart she knew how much he would be wanting her now.

It was his wedding day.

Nobody was enchanted with the royal bride, how could they be? The bride herself was eager enough, she sought to please, but had no idea how to do it. At one moment in the ceremony it almost seemed that the Prince was going to walk out of the chapel, and wipe his hands of the whole affair. He had been kneeling at the bride's side, when suddenly he rose. His three best men, his brothers, could not get him down again, and eventually it was the King who insisted, in one of his saner moods that day.

There was no lawful impediment against this marriage, so it seemed, though one would have thought that the greatest impediment of all was the wife he had been so sure that he had legally married, and the fact that in poor Maria's eyes he was still her husband.

It was one of the most ghastly marriages in the history of England, and by the end of it, it is dubious if the royal bridegroom knew what he was about. He wept bitterly, but there was no escape, and he must have known this. He was the man for ever hanging about his neck wads of bills, which became heavy as bricks and threatened to drown him, had it not been for Mama's aid, and the strange methods of getting out of the mess which she used.

He did not speak to his bride during the 'drawing-room' which followed, and then the party for the family at Buckingham House. They sat all round the table, with sumptuous

food and drink, which elated the bride, who ate mostly with her fingers, for she had become so excited that she hardly knew what she did. The Prince watched her mutely. If he was even more distressed, he gave no further sign of it. He just watched. The bells of London rang in some feigned joy. Later he drove with his bride to Carlton House, lavishly prepared to receive them, with exquisite flowers, any amount of lilies-of-the-valley brought there from Windsor.

"I shall never like lilies-of-the-valley again," was what he said.

The maids prepared the new Princess of Wales for the night, her nightgown embossed with small golden crowns which attracted her, and heavy lace. She was enthralled by the thought, for she was not a nervous bride at all.

"I want the schild," she told them.

"Of course, ma'am."

"I am zec Princess of Wales," and she laughed. The actual word amused her beyond belief. Did it mean a great fish? as she suspected. Or the crying of a small child?

"It is absurd!" she said and laughed gaily as she awaited her Prince.

When he arrived on the scene, he was so drunk that his gentlemen had to take action and literally push him through the door. He did not know where he was, or what he was supposed to do. Possibly if Maria had seen his misery at that moment, she would have been frenzied by sympathy for him, and disturbed beyond belief by painful apprehensions as to their future. How could they possibly live happily ever after?

Luckily Maria knew nothing about it, but she prayed for their mutual happiness, for a quieter life for her beloved George, and sons to come after him.

Possibly the Princess of Wales herself was slightly drunk, too. She had made the most of the good food and drink which

they had provided for her, and much appreciated it, for the delights of the table were always her own.

If the Prince tried to embrace her, it was the most transitory embrace. She told the world later that he spent his wedding night sleeping by the fire, where he had stumbled and had fallen, drunk to the world. She had left him there, and did not care if hot cinders fell on him.

Another of his marriages had gone west!

N I N E

THERE IS very little one can say about how poor Maria felt on the matter of her lover's marriage. It could only have been a tragic stab in the back, remorse, and at one time something which approached despair. One thing is certain, she would never have complained to anyone about how she had been treated, nor would she have blamed him. She would have said, 'The State held him fast. Poor, poor George! How much he has suffered for that!' Forgetful of the fact that she also suffered deeply.

I am afraid that by now she must have realised that her own marriage to him could never have held fast in a court of law. But it held in her heart. She had made vows which—whatever the circumstances—she would keep. For better, for worse, meant exactly that for Maria. She would remain faithful to the man she loved, until she died. Perhaps she prayed this might be soon. Perhaps she suffered quite abominably, though she had money, lots of servants, beautiful houses, and of course her memories. But memories are too frequently the ghosts of previous joys, and their very presence haunts.

Maria continued her life in faithful pattern of what it had always been. Never did one see a tear in her eye, or a quiver of her mouth. She went on with the routine as she had always done before any of this happened. She conducted herself as a lady of leisure, entertaining her brothers- and sisters-

in-law liberally and often. They remained loyal to her throughout everything, which proves that they believed George's marriage to her to be foolproof, and the way they felt about the whole sorry affair.

"I have good friends," was what she said to the few in whom she could confide.

It was Mama at Kew Palace who had ruthlessly ordained his life. This astute business woman must have known from the very start that if she waited long enough, Georgie's debts would catch up with him as they had done before. He never knew how to act, and turned to Mama for what was invariably wisdom and good advice.

She had set conditions to her good advice. England sought for the crown to continue through her eldest son's children, she had said, and as things were going there could and would be no children. He must change the pattern of his life, and she had emphasised her feelings. It was high time that he gave up his ways and settled down.

The Queen had had her own way, because George's financial embarrassments were in such a sordid condition that there had been nothing else that he could do. She would arrange to fill his purse only if he did what he was told.

"It is clear to all, George, that the lady you love cannot ever be the Queen. She is a Catholic, and you know that this is forbidden. She is not of royal birth, nor is she anything that is even approaching royal birth. You owe a duty to the State at all times, and to marry such a lady, one who is debarred for ever to you, is a shocking thought." He would never forget how insistent she had been.

He argued that he would 'love her till he died', for he was a sentimentalist to the last, but Mama had waved that aside with her fan, and got her way. She had married him off to a woman whom he could never love, and he was wretched.

The marriage was over, he had been too drunk to remember a single detail of it, and had been prodded through the ceremony by three of his brothers who were acting as best men for him. He had no memory of his wedding night, save of waking stone cold sober in the chill of morning, to find himself lying with his head in the grate, and disturbed by the vigorous snores of his soundly sleeping bride.

'Oh God, what have I done now?' had been his first question of himself when fully awake.

He was a married man, and not to Maria! He was even more in love with her now that he had ever been at any hour of his life. I shall love her till I die, he told himself yet again.

Mrs. Fitzherbert sold the house she had in Pall Mall, for there was no further use for it in her life, and it was far too near to Carlton House to be a friendly gesture to the Prince and his new wife. In its place—for she desired a *pied-à-terre* in London—she bought a smaller house, in Tilney Street, but this does not seem to have interested her very much, and she visited it seldom.

In Brighton she had the tall house on the Old Steine. From the side windows she could see the magnificent outline of the Pavilion, and the crocuses in the gardens in springtime, later the roses, and with autumn the dark sunflowers and asters, and the early chrysanthemums. She loved the house, where at night when the place was still, she could hear the surf song of the sea washing up on to the beach.

Brighton had always been the backcloth to her romances, it was here that her dearest dreams had come true, and now all she asked was to be able to live here, and die here when her time came.

Every Sunday she and her maid crossed the Old Steine and went up the opposite hill to the church where eventually she would lie in death, with a marble effigy, and three wedding rings on her fingers.

As she walked to church passers-by dropped her a curtesy, always gratefully accepted with a shy smile, and a lift of her hand. She was courteous in the extreme.

In the June following her marriage and when it had already been predicted, it was said that the Princess was *enceinte*, and the baby would be born at the end of January of next year. Maria's friends were troubled that she might meet the Princess and dislike her, but there was nothing she could really dislike about the poor simple girl who had married the Prince.

She said to nosy friends, "I hear that she is a very nice woman, kindly also. I do not think that she could dislike me."

"No, but . . ."

The rebuke in her eyes silenced their enquiries and they said no more. Privately it is possible that Maria felt that the love of her life had passed out of that life for ever, and could not be her husband any more. But she trusted in the divine power. She believed that if she waited faithfully and truly, something would happen. She had not waved farewell to happiness for ever, but at this time she must think of George's wife—his legal wife—and the little baby coming to them.

She must have known that the new Princess was not able to manage him well, and would never control him when he became angry, something at which Maria had ever succeeded. For the moment the good ladies did not clash or meet, and it was very possibly the good behaviour of Maria which guarded them against this crisis.

It was one pleasant evening in late August when the Prince slipped across the Old Steine, to try to see Maria. At last he had determined to do this. The summer was beginning to show the approach of autumn, a bunch of yellow or reddening leaves here and there, a new brightness about the berries, though the days were still amiably warm, and the air refresh-

ing. Flower women were selling late roses from their bulging baskets. He had come to the conclusion that if only he could speak to Maria again, and explain a little of his own troubles, it would help. He prayed that she would see him.

It thrilled him to be standing on her step, but the butler told him that the lady was not at home! He could have got abusive, he certainly raised his voice, and somehow he felt that she had heard him arguing there, but perhaps she was right when she knew that it would have been madness to come to him.

Infuriated, he returned to the Pavilion where in his own room, the one inside the entrance hall which he kept entirely for himself, he got very drunk. What he forgot was that his visit had been sheer heartbreak for the poor lady most concerned. She collapsed into the arms of a friend.

"If only I could leave off loving him," she sobbed, "then it would be so much easier, but this is the thing that I cannot do."

"They tell me that his marriage is shocking! She is so difficult."

"I hear nothing against him, or her. I am sure that she does her best, and being *enceinte* does not help the poor girl. But let us hope that the baby will bind them closer together. It should do, without a doubt."

"They tell me that he never goes near her now."

"Do not say such wicked things. His marriage and its secrets lie behind locked doors, and the thing to do is to let them remain there."

By now George must have discovered for certain that the magnificent marriage for the country which had been arranged for him by his mama, was a failure. Possibly any marriage would have been, and that was the wretched truth on which it had been built. The nation, his relatives and most people, believed that the arrival of an heir would make a big differ-

ence to everybody, for already the poor Prince had suffered far too much.

He had admitted from the first that he hated sharing her bed, and after the first few weeks stayed away from her. The fact that soap and water were not of the slightest interest to her aggravated him, and her nightdresses were of the voluminous kind that ancient landladies wore, so he said. He loathed the untidiness of her room, for she was in the habit of throwing her clothes on to the floor and becoming annoyed when a maidservant picked them up. The Prince averred that her bedroom stank of stale pomade, and the Princess herself did not care. He went back to his own bedroom, with its elegant purple and dark red hangings, and the three feathers above the curtained bed. Even if there was to be a baby in the new year . . . he felt his own room to be best.

Christmas was a homely festival passed with Mama and the relations all getting together, then they waited for the heir to be born at Carlton House. They had prepared for this as for a State occasion. The baby arrived earlier than had been anticipated, and was a big child, a daughter, born on the 10th of January 1796.

Early in her married life, Princess Caroline had gathered something of the story of George's love affair with Mrs. Fitzherbert, and was not jealous. In fact she actually said "Poor thing! She must have suffered much," which was undoubtedly true. She was not annoyed, nor was she jealous. Nearly a year with her husband would have told her that she had little to be jealous of. He was a hard man, kind in his own way, but impossible to get on with.

"V'y did he marry *me*?" she asked her ladies.

"It was necessary for him to have a Queen, and heirs," her ladies told her.

"But he does not like me," she said, quite truthfully.

This they could not explain away. She wept a little, then

recovered again, and amused herself in her own way.

During the Christmas festivities she had been anxious, for her husband had eaten so much, and of course drunk much more, that he had suffered a fever for a few days. Now, on the tenth, her little daughter was born.

The Prince visited the child in its cradle; the three white feathers artistically arranged above it, had been hurriedly taken away and a satin bow put there in their place. Although he said nothing, he must have noticed this with some apprehension. He had himself been so sure of a son.

"A girl," said his wife, and very bravely, "next time it will be zee boy!"

He said not a word.

Now, having married, he had a daughter, and this ended his marriage as far as he himself was concerned, all in the space of a year; he felt that he had acquitted himself, and now could go his own way. He wrote letters to Maria, letters which brought no reply. She met him at parties to which both of them were asked, but not alone. She had met his wife at one of these parties, spoken to the lady, and said that she was very amiable, which was true.

She was patient, this odd woman whom he had wedded. She did nothing to annoy, but equally nothing to please and she was devoted to the little daughter, who looked much like her father, and was a big child.

"She should have been the son," she complained when she knew that this was a princess, "but no matter. Zee next time it will be the boy. I 'ave zee son next time."

There never was a next time.

The unhappy Prince had had more than sufficient of the marriage which had gone wrong on him. The quiet marriage to his Maria had been far happier, and more after his heart's desire. The fact that the child was the wrong sex, did not fluster him. He said, "I have brothers galore, there is no lack

of kings in *my* family. If fate decrees that the next one is to be a Queen, then Queen she is, but there are going to be no more children by me."

One of his gentlemen had suggested, "A prince for us all next year?"

"No prince any year," George had snapped back, and slammed down the book he had been reading.

It was at this time that he made a new will. He was having attacks of 'the miseries'; a deep and abiding depression engrossed him and never let him be. He changed much in that first and only year of his marriage, when he tried to live as Caroline's husband, and failed so utterly.

"I am through with marriage," he told Mama.

She was well versed in George's peccadilloes, his quick changes of manner and of plans, and knew that he did outrageous things which one must forget and forgive. She would speak with her medical advisers, and they must make sure that the second babe was a prince.

She reminded him, "I never failed to give the country princes, and at least I expect the same good obedient behaviour from you, Georgie."

He now most laboriously made a new will, taking a sheer delight in the misery of it, and leaving everything he had to 'Maria Fitzherbert, my wife, the wife of my heart and soul'. It was the typical will of a man of this kind, emotional, and full of foolish regrets. He condoled with Maria with an excess of exaggerated sympathy. He slashed on an abundant colour to his emotions, as artists do in their paintings, and it was written, all ten pages of it, with overdone ponderousness.

It ended praying for Maria's happiness and future, and he said that he loved her. He added—

I now therefore, George Augustus Frederick, Prince of Wales, etc., leave all my property, and my personalities of

whatsoever kind and sort, to Maria Fitzherbert, who is my wife in the eyes of God, and who is and ever will be such in mine . . .

I likewise leave her the whole of the furniture of Carlton House, as it is all bought with my own money, together with all the bronze ornamented chimney pieces, all the hangings, chairs, tables ornamented and inlaid tables, bronzed tables, cabinets and consoles, girandoles, clocks, whether bronze or of any other material.

He continually appealed to heaven, and put his new daughter in the hands and safe keeping of the King and Queen.

It was one of his more flowery pieces of work, rambling off into all sorts of side issues, as well usual with him, and undoubtedly poor Mrs. Fitzherbert would have been more than indignant about it. One has to admit that George had had something of a shock when he met the Princess whom he had been fool enough to marry at the commands of others, and he still felt very badly about all this. I feel that he had been played a crazy trick of fate, and that the old Queen, his mama, should have been above doing such a thing. Had her tact been submerged? Or could it be that she had not really known what a shocking creature her niece was?

The Prince laid down the law about the future of his baby girl.

The mother of the child—called the Princess of Wales—should in no way be concerned to the education or care of the child, or have possession of her person, for though I forgive the false good and treachery of her conduct towards me, still the convincing and repeated proofs of her entire want of judgement, and of feeling, make me deem it incumbent . . . etc. etc.

He excused himself all the time, and forever returned to his almost sickening and unctuous eulogies about his beloved Maria, to whom he had behaved so abominably.

He ordered that the miniature of 'my beloved wife', as he insisted on calling Maria—and this he did in all his papers—should be buried with him and placed on his heart. He even went into the most gruesome details (he was somewhat addicted to these), stating that when she in turn died, her coffin should be placed next to his, and if she did not object, the inward sides of the coffins should be taken away, and the two coffins soldered together!

If she ever heard of it, and one is terrified that through some ill-advised chat she might have done, one can imagine what her feelings would have been. She had always known that George was over-emotional, over-eloquent as a lover, pompous in some ways, and a schoolboy in others. But deep down in his heart he meant none of these things. Maybe in truth adorable Maria was the only woman whom he had really loved. The others were just '*les affaires passionelles*', passing joys which left few scars on his heart. But Maria was the one to whom he always returned. The one he truly loved (when he could, and maybe this was not always possible).

Now disappointed with everything that had happened, the Prince concentrated almost dangerously on his determination to bring Mrs. Fitzherbert back into his life again. He fretted without her, he languished for her, his loneliness was, he said, insupportable.

He had a child which was what the country had demanded of him, and he felt that, even if the Princess was a disappointment, for she should have been a prince, she was his noble attempt to aid the country in distress. England did well under her queens, remember Elizabeth and good Queen Anne! If the seers informed him that he would have a son in the coming year, he made sure that they were wrong. This misguided

marriage of his, marriage with a woman with whom he had nothing in common had come to an end! He would never go near her bedroom again, and he meant this, though he was the gossips said, the Prince for ever popping in and out of ladies' bedrooms, and ready to pay a pretty compliment when there.

He was glad that his daughter was like him, with her bland, round face, her pink-and-white complexion, and her light yellowish fair hair with a hint of red in it perhaps, and the blue eyes. He should be happy now, he told his friends, for his wife was on her own. He had got rid of her, for ever he trusted, and all that he sought was to get his true wife back again, 'the only woman he had *really* married' was the way that he put it, and then indeed George would rejoice!

"Maybe time is with you, Sir," his friends said.

He prinked at that.

"Ah, time! Good old fellow, time, but he has a grey beard, and I look at myself in the mirror, and know that I am growing older." Then, in confidence, with a tremor in his voice, for it was far nearer to the truth than his friends realised, "The thought of a grey beard does not alarm me. Heroes have been grey-bearded," and he laughed.

He was still the gay Prince at heart.

It was only by mischance that he and Maria met in public. She could always carry off the moment with serene confidence, for she never behaved anything but immaculately. None need have worried for her, and when actually presented to the Princess of Wales, she had curtsied beautifully and had wished the lady well.

'I shall love her till I die,' said the Prince of Maria, once more.

Ultimately he wrote a stark letter to his wife, the sort of letter in which he stated the facts clearly, and which was nothing more than throwing her out of her job. He wished for a separation to be arranged, so that he could return to his old

life in true happiness. When the Princess received this dismissal, she was stunned and dismayed. Never having learnt English very fluently (she was not the sort of woman who had ever studied anything or anyone, and she had never put herself out of the way to learn something), she did not understand it. When it was explained to her, she said, "But he cannot do 'zis. It is not permit."

He had flung her from him as once he had dismissed poor Maria Fitzherbert on the same day in which at dawn he had sent her a note to say how he longed to see her that evening, and sent her his eternal devotions, and by night a note to say that he had finished with the entire arrangement.

Maria learnt of this letter down at Brighton, and was ashamed that he could behave in such a manner to the Princess. He sent her a glowing note, within a few hours, saying that he would now step back into her life, apparently believing that he could pick up the old relationship just as he had left it off. He fostered peculiar ideas. When he found that she ignored him and that he had made another of his many mistakes with her, he told his brothers that he would die.

The brothers were disturbed. They thought this might be possible, for George adored the dramatic, making a scene was his idea of the greatest fun. He had tried suicide once to make Maria marry him, nobody ever quite forgot that, though he had been fairly skilful in stabbing himself very wide of the mark. But the brothers despaired of him.

"One of these days George will go too far, and then none of us will be able to cover it for him," they said.

"He could bring about his own ruin," said one of them, who had himself gone to the Prince Regent and had argued with him. They went to visit Maria. In her pleasant parlour with its view of the square, the sea on the right, and the tall trees which had stood there for so long, she received them. They asked what they could do, but she had few instructions

to give them, for she knew how difficult he could be.

She said forcefully, "It is the duty of each one of you to keep with him, if only to guard him against himself. He is his own worst enemy, and whatever happens there must be no scandal and nothing derogatory to him or in any way connected with the crown."

This was, of course, easier said than done.

They told her that everything lay in her hands, and if she now opened a door again to him, it would be possible for her to be the saving grace. She promised that she would do everything she could to help, but he was a very difficult man. One could never be sure of what would come next.

In this state, he wrote the most passionate love letters to her, several pages to each one, and privately he loved doing this. Constantly he mentioned 'death' and 'my soul' and 'having to die before my time', and other alarming topics. Considering his father's mental condition, it became even more terrifying that he could have inherited something of King George the Third's trouble. He forcefully declared that he would die if Maria, the love of his life, did not return to him.

She was for ever his queen, he admitted no other, and he heavily underlined this.

After seventeen years of a husband, nothing can alter me, shake me, or change me, alike yours in life and death. And now, God bless you, my Maria, my only life, my only love.

Thine, unalterably thine,

George P.

There was a strong sense of nervousness in the court these days, the prevailing apprehension being that something disastrous was bound to occur, and the sooner he had a reconciliation with Maria Fitzherbert the better it would be for every-

body concerned. The Queen herself wrote to Maria about it, and it took something for George's mama to come down from her throne to plead, but she realised how alarming the present circumstances could be.

Mrs. Fitzherbert would not give way.

She was worried as to the manner in which her own church would accept such a change in her conduct. She demurred, she parried, but finally she came to a reasonable conclusion. At all costs she must do the right thing in the eyes of her Creator, so, in the summertime of 1799 she confessed to the Prince that she had now written to His Holiness the Pope himself. She had asked what His Holiness considered to be the right action for her to take. Where did her future action lie? Should she deny the man who had behaved so outrageously at times, accepting her when he wanted to do so, and discarding her with the ease of an acrobat on the ropes? She was too dazed to see the right road ahead of her, and she sent her appeal to the Holy Father in Rome.

She waited for the reply to her letter, and she found this time unbearable, and did not know how she would ever live through it. She went away praying that change of scene would help her, and she visited Wales, staying near the mountains which she had always loved.

She was pursued by the most passionate love letters almost daily from the Prince himself, trying to persuade her to 'be your sweet self to me again'. Unhappily she knew that he liked nothing better than writing letters, and would be profuse taking eight or nine pages in some of them. He always mentioned ending his life, and the fact that his own life was not worth living, because his longing for her demented him. If she did not return into his life, then he would die, and the world would blame her for his death.

"What can I do?" she asked the Duke of Sussex. "One has to admit that he has had a terrible time, for nothing in his

marriage has transpired wholly satisfactorily for him, and he is distracted. He could do anything in a fit of misery, and that is what worries me so much."

"Maybe you are his wife, I mean his lawful wife, and if this is so, then you should be with him."

She nodded. "It cannot be much longer, and then His Holiness will instruct me what to do. I cannot take him back without the authority of the church. He is a married man and if I now accepted him without the guidance of Rome, it would be mortal sin."

"Whatever happens, then, we must await the Pope's reply?"

"Yes, we can do nothing else."

Daily letters continued from the Prince seeking leave to visit her, and crazy to see her yet again. It was during this time of tremendous indecision and doubt, that young Minney Seymour came back into her life.

The Seymours had been Maria's permanent friends through all her troubles, and very good friends they had proved to be. Now they had to go abroad again for a considerable time, and had no one else with whom they felt they could safely leave the little girl. It appears to be quite a natural thing that they should turn to Maria Fitzherbert, who was their greatest friend. Yet I have always been slightly suspicious of it.

Whilst Maria was most firm in the Catholic faith, the Seymours were rigid Protestants, and they had always shrunk from the Church of Rome. One would have supposed that they would have resisted leaving the child whilst they were abroad for some two or three years, with someone who could very easily make the most of that time to ground the little girl in the foundations of her church. It could—and has been known to—happen very easily. Why did they consent to do something which was obviously against their principles? Was it that Minney was (as people said) the actual daughter of

Mrs. Fitzherbert? I am sure that later on, in her grown-up life, Minney herself thought so. Was it that the Seymours had therefore no right to deny Maria custody of the child, seeing that originally the little girl had been entrusted to them by her own mother, who now sought to regain custody of her?

I feel that this is by far the most reasonable answer.

In those days there was far greater controversy about the Church of Rome versus Protestantism than there has been more lately. Maria was extremely religious and rigid in her principles and this was not the sort of attitude which the Seymours would have appreciated, seeing how strongly they felt in the opposite direction.

At the time when the arrangements were made, none would have thought for a single moment that the old-time associations between the Prince and Mrs. Fitzherbert could ever be revived. They had parted for some considerable time; he had married a lady of royal birth, accepted at the time as a suitable Princess of Wales by his parents, and they now had a daughter who was heir to the throne of England.

In the eyes of the world the pre-marital affair, the flirtation which so many men have in the springtime of their lives, was over and done with. The bachelor affair had ended with the wedding ring on the finger of another, and there was nothing at all extraordinary about that. Whether the Prince was miserably unhappy or not, is doubtful, but this was nothing to do with the arrangements that Maria now made on her own. Her life was her own, and she could employ it as she wished. She was past forty. This, one felt, was old age at the time in which she was living, and of course she had lost much of the brilliance of her good looks through the unbearable miseries which she had suffered during most of her life.

I am sure that she felt that the future would be marvellous.

When the Seymours, impatient to get abroad, asked if in

their absence she would love and guard little Minney, she wrote back to them immediately and said—

I do assure you that nothing has, nor could, make me happier,

and this was undoubtedly true. It would give her immense happiness whomsoever's child it was.

She loved babies, and would have adored a child of her own. If this is exactly what little Minney was (and I myself believe from what she said and wrote, that this *was* true), nothing could have worked out better for her.

Nurseries were prepared for the baby, toys bought, and all arrangements made for the little girl's comfort.

England had passed through the eighteenth century which would make history, and the new one would put on the throne the most reliable Queen England has ever had, the woman who not only restored it to a dominant position (and to an almost overpowering position in the end), but 'made her mightier yet'. On a snowy night at Brighton Maria saw it pass, and looked to the stars to guide her. In Kew, the poor old Queen saw her husband madder than ever, still burbling to himself about friends who he vowed were with them, but whom his wife could never see.

Some wondered, would the new century bring an invasion of England by the defiant French? for the story was that they lay in wait for the moment at which to attack. The nineteenth century could and would see many things, and England must be prepared for anything.

Maria had the little girl with her. Her eyes watching the centuries change must have smiled at the thought.

A new century was born.

T E N

WHEN THE new year dawned, Maria received the ultimate reply from The Vatican for which she had been waiting for such a long time. She had stayed undecided what to do next, until she got this letter. She had suffered so badly that she could not bear things still to be uncertain; for good and all she had sought guidance on the question of her marriage to the Prince; was it a real marriage, or was it a hoax? If a marriage, was it her duty to return to him as being her rightful husband? Or was it not a marriage and never could be, which would mean that it would be far wiser to forget the happiness and lay it behind her in her life?

During this period they were meeting fairly frequently and it no longer startled either of them to find the other sharing a party. She contrived to surprise those who were her enemies, and the chatterboxes who never believed that she had ever written to Rome, and so of course would never get a reply.

When the Brief came to her from Rome, she shuddered with apprehension, but the fates were with her. The marriage was accepted by the Holy Father as being a true one, and it was within the province of the church to give them its blessing.

At first Maria nearly had a breakdown from sheer joy. She could not believe it. Then, when she could bring herself to do it, she sent information to the Prince and awaited his reaction.

It was at Brighton, early in the year, when the weather was sharp, icicles dripped from roofs, and there was the fresh sparkle of snow on the ground. She waited unable to believe that it was for him that she waited. Deeply in love, growing older, but never tired of the man she adored, she had not dared to believe that this could come true.

An eternity of time lay between the last time that he had come to her house, and today. Knowing him as well as she did, she appreciated that quite likely even now he would not come. He could say that the King (as one day he would be) had been kept waiting too long and now he would not come. But perhaps she did not realise how much the man also had suffered.

It was, moreover, true that the Prince had never been happy since the day they had split. When he received the letter, he could not believe it to be true. He loved her desperately, and would always come back to her, because—as he had once said—‘with Maria I feel safe’. The fact that his own life was so impossible, had made an additional cross to carry. Now he called for a thick coat and went to the door. To his personal butler he said “I may not be back tonight,” and with never a quiver the man said, “Very good, your Royal Highness,” and left it at that. He put two and two together; the Prince had received a letter from Mrs. Fitzherbert, and he was going back to her; probably for ever this time.

He walked across the Old Steine, the snow thickening, and falling in big crystallised flakes. I shall turn Catholic myself, he thought, in the supreme exuberance of this delicious moment. He had brought comfits for little Minney, whom he adored, and he heard the child laughing. Outside some carollers were singing of the three wise men, who went ‘as with gladness’, led by the guiding star.

He was in poetic mood, warming with every moment. Her butler opened the door to him and bowed low. George crossed

the threshold, and felt that he was a man uplifted. How precious was this sweet woman who had sent the good news to him and had begged him to see her again! He had never been more in love with her, he protested to himself, and somehow she knew that she had never been more in love with him.

She saw the Prince coming in at her door, and she curtsied low. The door shut, and they were alone together.

It was the night of love for them. Maria had grown older, and she had fattened somewhat, not so careful of her personal appearance as she had always been before, but lovely all the same. If she was older, she was still his wife.

'The new century will bring us all good fortune, I feel this in my bones,' she told herself, 'for it is going to be a changed England.'

She might be forty-four in years now, and that was real old age for any woman, but at the same time she felt transformed by the fact that the Prince still loved her. Her complexion had always been a joy, and did not fade, possibly because she was particular about diet, and never allowed herself to stray from this.

They dined in her room that night, and somehow neither of them cared what it was they ate, for the fact that they were in heaven eclipsed all else. She refused to listen to a single word against the Princess of Wales, but instantly held up a reproving finger, warning him. "No, not now! She is ill, poor lady, and those who would condemn her should forgive her, for she could never help that which she did."

They slept that night in her house, and already the unhappy time between the years when he had been here so often, and today, seemed to disappear, and she felt that she had always had him for her love, and always would. A new year had lifted hands to bless them. They were more in love than they had ever been before, and could verify this, she had turned back

to him, and she prayed that he was all hers unto eternity.

Now happily together again, they seemed to draw a tulle veil over the disastrous period when they had been apart. They were only too anxious to prevent an invasion, for the French were terrifying. A French fleet waited off Calais, they were told, and this country by the sea was dotted with small Martello towers, where the enemy was to be held up for a short time, anything to outwit an invasion. It was considered that it could not be long before the French came. Spies were said to be everywhere.

The Prince was deeply concerned, and worked as he had never done before. "We have great men to fight for us," he said, "greater than the French could ever have, and one of our greatest is young Captain Nelson." Maria had heard of him with interest, and was thrilled.

The story went the rounds that the enemy were devising some peculiar form of flat-bottomed boats in which they would cross the Channel to invade. The Prince was eager to do everything that he could, and although he probably realised that he could never command an army, he swore that if he could get the right man to help him, then he *would* win.

He longed to show force, to be a noble figure, and heartily disliked the fact that he was held back, for his big desire was to fight the French in person.

"I should not be prevented. I am an Englishman as is every other fellow born in this island, and I desire to fight for my country. If I die, what matters it? I have a daughter, a strong child, to carry on. I have remarkable brothers, and they have sons. Is it that none believe that war could come?" She tried to control him, but his wish to help was uncontrollable.

They were told that the King's condition was worsening all the time. He was suffering from repeated tempestuous moods, which were difficult to fight, impossible to keep in check.

Whilst the suspense of imminent war lasted into the springtime of 1804, suddenly it seemed that maybe Napoleon had entirely changed his plans. It was the sort of thing he did. England waited, the Martello towers were manned day and night, and such gentlemen as were past the youthful age which would entitle them to join as soldiers of the line, would fire guns from the towers and die at their post if needs be. There was a surge of desire to fight amongst all men. Any alien who set a foot to conquer these islands would learn his lesson and sign that lesson with a pen dipped in his own life blood.

Nothing would destroy the brave English.

It seemed now that the anxiety suddenly lessened. The crisis which was so long in coming, abruptly died. With each new year they had said 'This will be the year of the great war,' and it never came to anything.

But even with an agony of consternation lest war should come, there were moments of relaxation. The Prince was gay again now, and Brighton was delicious. It was said that although he thought Vienna to be the city of dreams, the most lovely place in all the world, Brighton with its exquisite Pavilion, and all its attractions, ran it very close. It certainly was a most magnificent runner-up in charm.

There were little pastoral parties given, and the idea of a pastoral party was considered to be too too delicious. Ladies went to them dressed as milkmaids and such, and gentlemen as ploughboys and carters. One aspiring host hired cows from a farm at Rottingdean and had them as a background.

It is possible that at this time entertaining was at its highest peak, and better than at any other period in Europe. There was a great deal of music, and there were whist parties, though the Prince did not play. He preferred to act in the charades, one of his pet games, or to have a romp of some kind, a romp which ended with a pretty girl in some dark corner, and none dared say no to the heir.

Behind it all, however, a shadow lay.

It would seem that poor Maria had come into this world with a shadow for ever over her. This time it was trouble over the little girl Minney Seymour. Minney was now ordained, and her family were distressed that she, a Protestant child, should be educated in a Catholic household. Much agitated, Maria turned to the Prince for help, for he loved Minney as much as she did.

"If I lose her, I shall die of a broken heart," she said, "not that my heart matters, but how bad it would be for the child! She has learnt to love us all, to trust us, and she would hate to be deprived of that love and trust."

The Prince came into the breach, arguing that he also adored the child, and not for the world would they part with her. He settled ten thousand pounds on her. He himself professed that he would be her guardian and see that she was brought up in the faith of the Church of England to which he belonged.

Maria was terrified at what was happening. She loved the little girl almost more than she would have done had she been her own child (and I still believe that she was.) In return, the Seymour family—the Hertfords—felt keenly about it. It came at the time when the Queen was doing battle to obtain custody of the Princess Charlotte. With the years the girl's mother, the Princess of Wales, had become more and more utterly impossible. She dreamed fantastic dreams, and behaved like someone in dementia. They were quite sure that she was not, and never had been absolutely sane.

How could she possibly have the custody of the little girl who meant so much not only to the royal family but to England itself? The Prince was furious.

"The whole world maddens me," said he indignantly to Mrs. Fitzherbert. "Trying to get Minney for you, and I am in trouble with my daughter as well."

The fear hung over them, and it came at a time when they should have been so happy.

"People do these things to drive us crazy," said the angry Prince in Maria's parlour. "This is why the Hertfords make this fuss over Minney; this is why the Princess of Wales keeps clinging on to Charlotte. It's a disgrace."

The fear of Minney being removed from her custody was too horrifying for Maria, it hung over her, menacing her all the time, and was almost the greatest trouble she had had to bear, and it came at a time when the reunion between herself and George had made them so serenely happy.

The Prince, in a new burst of joy over being restored to the woman who he had maintained was, and always would be, his wife, had launched forth into a fresh series of 'improvements' to his Pavilion. He had a sudden inspiration for Chinese design, porcelain vases of giant proportions, fantastic curtaining and friezes, the sort of beauty that no one else had ever paraded before, but which he was now determined to institute as a new fashion for the world. He would make this the most bizarre palace that had ever been.

Maria was not sure that she liked the extraordinary new treatments which inspired him. There were moments when she even wondered if they were right for the place, proper for it, and she shrank slightly from their exaggeration, the crudity, and what she almost felt was a distortion of the imagination.

All the time the anxiety for Minney continued, and publicity was touching it. The old rumour began again, asking was it true that she was the Prince's child? Was it a secret jealously guarded, and one day the whole world would know who her father really was?

The Prince, now violently rebellious, said that the Hertfords would take possession of darling little Minney only over his own dead body. What could one do to bring the matter to rest?

In the middle of it all came the Battle of Trafalgar with its sad news that Lord Nelson was dead. Maria could not believe that this was true. Even more upset was the Prince, and all England was horrified that the world's greatest hero had died like this. There was a magnificent funeral, the finest anyone had ever seen, and all day the streets of London were packed with sightseers.

Did Mrs. Fitzherbert think of poor Emma, mourning with the hero's little girl beside her, and for ever in the shadowy background? How far does love take one? Maria must have thought, as she wondered about it. She learnt that after it was all over and the echoes were still, the beautiful Lady Hamilton had gone to St. Paul's Cathedral with her daughter, hand in hand. It had been arranged that the grave would not be closed until she had been there. She stood for a time looking at it, too moved to speak. Her great love story was over, but the great love story of Maria was still continuing, and the hour had come when time was against her, and she knew it.

The case of the custody of little Minney was now before the House of Lords, a terrible thought. The Prince was seething over it, and working hard behind the scenes, for this was the approach he always preferred. In the end he won the day, and Mrs. Fitzherbert kept her custody of the little child. But the rules staggered her. Minney was never to receive any Catholic instruction, and must have only Protestant nurses, governesses or tutors. But Maria would have clung to any promise, anything to have the girl who meant everything to her.

"You are sure this will not occur again?" she asked the Prince.

"If it does. I shall win the day as before," and he could now afford to laugh.

It must have cost a fortune, and although this was the greatest service that he had ever done for her, the strange thing

is that from now on the alliance began to slip. She could feel it, but somehow now she did not fight it.

It ended the night of an enormous dinner party at Carlton House (now restored on other people's money). King Louis the XVIIIth of France and his family were the guests of honour, and Maria arrived and went to her usual place. She was then told that this was *not* her place; the Prince had ordered that she must go to the far end of the table. It meant that he no longer accepted her as his wife; this was the way that he invariably did these things. He could be utterly brutal.

Next day she wrote to him, and added—

I can never submit to appear in your home, in any place or situation, but in that where you first placed me, many years ago . . .

It was over, and she knew it.

She went to the home she had bought in Battersea, Sherwood Lodge, with a sweet view of the grey river, somewhere where she was happy. 'What do I do with my life?' she must have asked herself wretchedly. 'It is changing, but then everything is changing. The whole world is entirely different.'

Her mind went back to the French Revolution which had shocked her so desperately, and then Lord Nelson dying at Trafalgar. The new world, the Princess of Wales almost a prisoner, and the Prince's pretty daughter growing up.

Am I too *old*? she asked herself, as all women do, and it is harder for a beautiful woman to age than for a frump, who may regain some dignity with greying hair and lines coming on her face. What do I do *next*? she thought.

What next, indeed!

E L E V E N

AGE IS no true friend, and Maria was learning this hardest of all lessons. She had now said goodbye to the lovely years, to the return of her beloved Prince into her life, which had been something of a St. Martin's summer to her, a rare summer which most women never get. She must, she thought, be thankful for small mercies.

In her St. Martin's summer she had blossomed out even more magnificently than in her radiant youth. But now she was beginning to put on weight. Her life at court had been too lavish, for there the dinners would last for over three hours, with endless courses too lovely to be refused.

Now her Indian summer was over. She wondered how she could bear the sorrow, for she loved him still. Perhaps the saddest thing in her life was the fact that she never could cease to love this man who treated her so desperately badly.

Time had not been kind to him.

He had always been very much inclined to put on weight, and now was tubby in the extreme; he had to wear 'stays' made to keep his stomach from being too obvious. One comic paper of the times actually dared suggest that as the Princess of Wales could not produce a son for her husband, only a daughter, it was believed that he himself was in the family way with twin boys!

He was now in his autumn, too, but the autumn that men face is very different from that which comes to a woman. He was attracted by Lady Hertford. She, it seemed, was different from previous loves, because she could bully him. Maria had always been too gentle, for that was her nature; but Lady Hertford was a bully at heart, quick with the snappy answer, and ever ready to find fault, even with her lover.

Unhappily his sudden delight in a new love stayed the prolonged friendship into which his romance with Maria could have slipped. It was a different and a very unfriendly position for both of them.

One suspects that poor Maria had thought that her letter explaining the situation to her prince, would meet with an apology and after a time he would stage a stupendous come-back to her, and once again the love affair would blossom. But this did not happen now. His reply to her hedged the issue. He was already absorbed with Lady Hertford, amused to be dictated to, surprised to be chided, and facing a new form of love with a new *belle*. It was plain that he would not, for the moment anyhow (the poor lady must have prayed that this was only for the moment), be coming back to her arms. Being himself, he tried to pacify both ladies at the same time, by sending identical handsome diamond necklaces to each!

Poor George! He had ever thought that he could buy love if only he paid enough for it, and he was so wrong.

He did not visit Maria. Just at first she kept telling herself that it was merely a matter of time, and she consulted her numerous brothers-in-law, who never failed her. They had never admired the Prince's behaviour, and were quite frank about it when she wept. Most of them had lady loves, and a crowd of illegitimate children of their own, but they got out of the situation by alluding to the lady loves as their 'unmarried wives'. The Duke of York was particularly good

to her. He prophesied that, given time, George would come back to her.

He never did.

For Maria, the twilight of her life was none too gently closing in on her.

She dwelt on in Battersea when in London, in her house off the Old Steine when in Brighton. She loved the place, even if her eyes for ever wandered across to the towers and minarets of the noble Pavilion where the Prince came so frequently, though never with his wife. Maria could have borne it if he had brought his wife with him, but now she knew that, like herself, the Princess of Wales had suffered, too. But she forgave him.

On some occasions she was asked to the Pavilion, not to her old position of course, but whenever she went (and she felt it would be foolish to refuse) she was horribly aware that it ever became more difficult for her. Their happiness was drifting further and further apart. He made a point of coming to speak to her. But he came more as a prince being kind to his guests, than a lover to his beloved.

"We are both of us putting on too much weight," he told her with a smile.

"We eat too much," she said, also with a smile.

"I need you by my side to restrain me," and he giggled. "My valet ties me up in a flannel binder like a babe in arms. He says I look more shapely in it, but it gets tiresome at the end of a long evening."

"It makes you look very slender," she said, yet knew that this was not quite true, for he could not help showing how obese he was becoming.

His father's condition at Kew worsened, and George became Prince Regent.

Time went on.

For Maria Fitzherbert there was the tremendous satisfac-

tion of having Minney with her. She had grown up into an adorable girl, gentle, friendly and pretty. She was, of course, the apple of Mrs. Fitzherbert's eye, the consolation and joy of her ageing years.

Maria did at this time adopt, or it would seem that she adopted, a second girl, her niece, daughter of her late brother Jack Smythe, and her name was Maryanne. One must admit that Maria had a foolproof means of producing in her home children and young girls whom somehow or other she had 'adopted'.

The new girl was pretty, not as gay as the elder adopted daughter, but charming, and almost immediately after she had become part of the household, there came that unexpected and horrifying tragedy, the death of the Princess Charlotte.

Her marriage had been cheered. She was a girl like her father, who had insisted on having her own way, and got it. She adored the Prince Leopold whom she had espoused, and never hesitated to show her affection for him. The nation had been thrilled by the idea of her baby, and were utterly dismayed when they learnt the tragic truth, both of them had died.

More horrified than anyone was Mrs. Fitzherbert.

"It can't be true!" she gasped when she first heard the news.

It was true.

There was a tremendous funeral at Windsor, where the poor girl was buried, her boy babe in her arms. But this was more than a tragedy, it provided its own emergency. In spite of all those children that the 'mad King' had sired, here they were with no heir ahead for the throne.

At Brighton the Regent sent for the three eldest of his brothers. They drove down in a chaise, driving fast, and came to Brighton and were shown into the special room which

was not George's study, but the room in which he conducted all the serious business of State.

On the way down the three of them had talked of it, and seeing the room in which they would all meet, they knew that their unhappy ideas were only too correct.

"You know what this is about?" George said when he met them. "I have lost my daughter, the finest daughter a man ever had, the dearest girl, and she lies dead with my grandson in her arms. A boy, and *like me*." He paused for some enthusiastic remarks, but nobody said anything. After all, they felt that their own position was too dangerous for this.

They mutely sympathised.

After a moment, he went on again. "It would seem that I am the only son of the house who has stuck to his duty, and done what he should have done. Now, I am bereft."

Again they purred an apprehensive sympathy.

He said. "My time is over," and sighed heavily, annoyed that not one of them expressed that abundant sympathy which they should have shown. "I can do no more, but my brothers must wed, and this time it must be no marriage under a curtain, but the real indisputable alliance. There *must* be children of the marriage, an heir for the throne."

The Duke of Kent would have argued. He loved Madame de St. Laurent, with whom he had been living for twenty-seven happy years, and he did not see why he should break up a happy home with all those children, for his lady friend had presented him with a baby almost every year.

"But that is over!" George said firmly.

Within a month he married Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, who had two children—a son and a daughter—by her previous marriage. She was not pretty, but fairly discreet, and having had two children they assumed she could have more. This was the message skilfully conveyed to the agonised Duke.

The Duke of Cambridge would wed a lady from that same land, and the Duke of Clarence followed, to do the same thing. He hated parting with Mrs. Jordan, who he assured the world was the 'love of his life', and their crowd of children were now fatherless.

That was a sickening day at the Pavilion. When they had done with their remorselessly unrelenting brother, they refused the refreshment which he offered, and went across the street to see the woman who they had always felt was their true sister-in-law. She was waiting for them with refreshment, and welcomed them. She did not have to be told, she knew already what must have happened.

Tenderly she consoled the three royal Dukes who now would each be widowed of his so-called wife, and forced to marry one who they felt could only be an unpleasant and unwanted stranger.

"Life is hard," she said tenderly, "all who are royal must by the hand of fate find it more cruel than those who are ordinary people. But time will reward you."

She also had suffered, as they all knew, and somehow had kept her tearless calm, her quiet acceptance of the position, so that all admired her.

"If we wed, how are we sure that we shall have a prince to wear the crown?" asked Clarence uneasily.

She smiled. "One must trust in God. Usually people who do marry, have children. We have to accept the unacceptable. We have to do what we are told."

It was Kent who now spoke; ever pugilistic, he was very much the fighting soldier, and was reputed to have had more rows with his elder brother than all the rest of them put together. "I think that George is the one who should have another child. Why should *we* suffer because he has failed?"

The lady was kind.

"Because someone always has to suffer for the failure

of others. Fate insists that the bill should be paid, and we all know this. It happens, and the only thing to do is to accept it with as good a grace as possible." She added very sweetly, "Princes are clever with good graces."

They knew that she had suffered more than they had. Maria, such a kind and amiable woman, now so grievously alone. There was nothing that she could do, of course, nothing that anyone could do, for whatever happened there must be an heir to the crown.

The Dukes married. She heard of it from a friend. The Duke of Kent had made most fuss, and was still furious at parting with Madame de St. Laurent. He married his stout wife, and he took her to the Palace of Kew where they went through a second marriage service in the presence of Queen Charlotte. The old Queen might be ageing, but even now she kept her sons and daughters under her thumb.

That evening he rushed off to visit Mrs. Fitzherbert and to tell her that he had done his best. He hated doing his best. Never had a man suffered more or been less willing. But he was the one who satisfied the fates.

On May the 24th of the following year, 1819, in Kensington Palace, where Kent and his wife had been given a suite of rooms, the small, red-headed Princess Victoria was born.

When the news came to George, he stood silent for a moment, then he said, "My mother had all those sons, yet it seems that fate is determined now to put a girl on the throne of England. It should have been my darling Charlotte. Surely it can never be Edward's little girl? See, what is her name? Georgina? No, of course not! It is Victoria. What an absurd name to have!"

Mrs. Fitzherbert grew older, and she spent most of her time quietly in her home at Brighton. It was here that Minney eventually fell in love.

Nobody was more enchanted than the Prince Regent. He would pay for the wedding, even if it cost thousands. He liked George Fitzclarence, who was the man in her life, and was also her first cousin, but that did not matter. Love, said the Regent, was the tremendous asset to life. Love was what everyone needed. But quite suddenly the wedding was cancelled. Never was there such a time for things going wrong.

"Minney is too young anyway. I am glad that she is waiting for a while," said Mrs. Fitzherbert.

"She has met another?" was suggested.

"Not yet, but she will," said her adoptive mother. She cared deeply for this child, and now she was finding that life was growing perpetually more difficult. These were the years when everything happened all at once.

The death of the Princess Charlotte and her baby had been a tragedy. In 1818 Queen Charlotte had died, and in 1820 the Duke of Kent died most unexpectedly from a cold he had caught which rapidly turned to pneumonia. Within three days of that, King George the Third died, and there was great excitement over the coronation of the new King.

Shall I be asked? Maria thought uneasily. She could hardly believe that he was now the King, a man with his wife discarded, and his love (herself) put to one side. She waited for her own invitation to the coronation, but it never came. That must have been a moment of the utmost heartbreak for her. She had never thought that they had drifted as far apart as that. She could not understand it. Now he ignored her.

But when she heard what had happened at the crowning of the fourth George, perhaps she was glad that she had not been there. His real wife had made up her mind that whatever happened she—also with no invitation to the Abbey—would go, for she had the right, and she *would* attend.

She had driven to the Abbey, and someone had seen her arrival in Parliament Square, and most hurriedly they had shut the doors, and done their best to keep them shut. The lady was prepared for a challenge, and also to accept it. She had brought her henchmen with her to batter on the doors, and they made such a noise that it almost drowned the coronation service which was in progress within the great church.

The King turned deadly pale. He was already on the throne, and of course he knew quite well who was on the other side of that hideous battering noise at the porch. Maria would never have been so inelegant, or so defiant. He realised that he could have trusted her, and maybe some pang stabbed through him. What he would do if Caroline succeeded in entering the Abbey church, he could not imagine. There could be only one of those hoydenish scenes which she loved. Though he had not prayed for a long time, this was the moment when he must have despatched an imploring prayer to heaven for his own safety.

The Queen, poor lady, had in the end to drive away unwanted. She went back to her curious half-demented life in Blackheath, using terrible language about her husband, and furiously angry that she had been spurned.

One thing one must say about the new King. He was changeable, thankless, a man of many strange habits, but he was never mean. On his marriage to Maria Fitzherbert he had said that he would allot her ten thousand pounds a year, which was riches, of course. This had unfortunately worked out in the neighbourhood of three thousand a year, all that he could afford, but now in 1820 he came up to the originally promised ten thousand. She wrote back graciously, but calmly, though the announcement must have come to her as somewhat of a surprise.

Life does surprise one, she thought, one never draws

even with it, one never know what lies ahead for any of us. What comes next, and shall I have the courage left to accept it?

Unhappily Minney did not marry satisfactorily as far as her adoptive mother felt. She fell in love with George Dawson, a young cavalry officer, very good-looking, with an amusing tongue, one who boasted that he was a ladies' man. At first Maria had taken to him, he was well versed in good manners, but when she found that he drank, she was worried and felt that he was the wrong man for Minney.

The strain began when she tried to change her darling's affections, and failed. Perhaps this unfortunate lady had shed more tears than most during her sad life, and this was a bad period. Minney was very angry, she wanted her own way, and fought for it, which rather gave the idea that this persistence was an inheritance from King George the Fourth, who, so rumour had it, was her father.

She was the King's ward, and he gave her the most lavish jewels when she married her young man. Mrs. Fitzherbert could not bring herself to attend the ceremony, which must have seemed a tragedy to Maria.

It must also have been extra terrible for her, having spent so much of herself on the child, and she had suffered too long in the way of disappointment without this coming along as well. She prayed now for quiet, for time to run on an even keel, with no need any more for bitter tears. She was growing older, much older, and it is hard for a very beautiful woman to age, much harder than for the everyday girl to become middle-aged and go on to the disaster of lines round the eyes, a dropped face and the light hair thinning and turning grey with time.

In 1830 she was anguished when the King became ill. He rallied, much to her joy—she had enquired after him every

day—but he was never quite the same again. It was June and he was at Windsor. Sir Henry Halford was his doctor, and he wrote a long letter to Mrs. Fitzherbert telling her what was the matter. The King had considerable difficulty in breathing, a condition which was most painful to watch, for asthma was in the family. The Dukes of Clarence and Sussex suffered from it, and their sisters had had it as children, but they had fortunately managed to outgrow it.

At the end of the month of June, it was proclaimed that the King was very seriously ill. Mrs. Fitzherbert got the news, and immediately came to London; she went to the house she still had there, and sent him a letter. None know what she said, but they told her that he was glad to get it, and kept it by him as he lay there. But he did not seek that she should visit him.

She waited in an agony of anticipation for the call to come. She prayed that someone would send for her, and perhaps this was the time when the poor thing suffered the most, for his cry for her never came.

He died in the early morning of June the 26th, and they sent for the Duke of Clarence, who now would be King. The bells of London tolled, she must have heard them. But she did have one happiness, one consolation which comforted her enormously.

But there must have been moments in her life when she looked back on what had been for her a great love, and longed for some of those exquisite moments again; the joy in his arms, the honeymoon at Richmond, and their happiness together in the early years of what they called their married life.

It was a tremendous relief that it was now accepted that she *had* been married to him, she had loved him through to death itself, and she would never have betrayed him for a single moment.

She was interested in the Duchess of Kent, and the fact that Princess Victoria was in the line of succession, 'a blue-eyed pale little girl with light red hair, and much under her mama's thumb', was the way she was described.

Maria spent the winter of 1836-7 in Steine House, as she always preferred to spend it. She was happy there, with the view across to the gardens of the Pavilion, and the peep at minarets and great towers which she got when the leaves had fallen. It was in the March that the first news came that she was not well. She was now eighty-one years old, and suddenly it seemed that she was badly failing.

They sent for Minney and her husband, who were in Dorset at the time, and they came rushing through England to get to Mama. They arrived in time.

She died on the Easter Monday.

She was the heroine of her age, the lady of abundant happinesses and unhappinesses, resigned and calm, never flying into rages, or paroxysms of distress, but behaving as she had been taught as a child, with cool discretion and dignity. She believed that the King had truly been her husband, and would never have stayed with him had she thought anything else. She adhered to virtue, and declared herself loyal to God. All Brighton would have told you that this lady who walked amongst them, with a maidservant attending her, never failed to be kind to those in trouble, nor did she withhold her generosity from those who were in need.

She was treated extremely badly by the man she loved so devotedly, and possibly the worst pang came when he was dying and did not send for her. But if she felt this, she never said a word.

They lie far apart, he at Windsor, and she at her own church in Brighton. She had trodden the hard road, but one thing is quite sure, she loved him for eternity, and to that love there was no end.

